

ACHIEVING DEVELOPMENT RESULTS through Clear Communication in the East African Community

From the African Community of Practice on Managing for Development Results at the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF)



Case Study
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SYNOPSIS

This case study explores how the East African Community (EAC) uses communication to engage stakeholders, including citizens, to manage integration - a central pillar of its development agenda. At the core of the case study lies the question of how regional economic communities (RECs) build relations with and engage their citizens to implement and manage integration. To tackle this question, the study examined communication practices in the EAC through in-depth interviews with people in the EAC administration and a review of newspapers, strategy reports, and studies.

Among the key findings: The EAC uses communication to elicit commitment. Its use of a mix of new social and traditional media boosts its capacity to spread multiple integration messages through different channels to the highest number of citizens. Its focus of communication, however, is not to raise awareness but to build the capacity of stakeholders to spread information on integration throughout their spheres of influence.

The main conclusion: Communication is at the center of EAC planning and implementation of development goals. It is a tool to engage stakeholders and citizens across the partner states to own and drive the integration agenda. But at base, to be an effective communicator, the EAC must commit resources, establish sound policy, and follow good practices.

The key lessons: Proper and clear communication developed consultatively with member states is vital for rallying different stakeholders to support the integration agenda, as communication is a leadership tool to manage an integration process effectively. It is essential to use communication to manage results, not crises. And political will is a cornerstone for the success of communication to engage citizens, being essential to building and sustaining capacity that needs to be put in place. Notably, the full exploitation of ever-changing technologies along with skillful use of traditional media is essential for leaders.

The main recommendations: The EAC and other African RECs need to establish robust and creative communication Strategies as benchmarks for achieving development results. The EAC and other RECs must ensure that the communication strategy incorporates a consultative dialogue framework. And institutions coordinating capacity building on the continent like the African Capacity Building Foundation and partners, need to support the RECs in developing adequate communication systems and policies for effective communication with member states and staff.

Introduction

Communication that engages all stakeholders, including citizens, is essential for achieving development results.

At the core of this case study lies the question of how regional economic communities (RECs) build relations with and engage their citizens to implement and manage integration. To tackle this question, the study examined communication practices in the East African Community (EAC) through in-depth interviews with key people in the EAC administration and a review of selected newspapers, strategy reports, and studies (listed in the References).

Regional integration is a core focus of EAC's development agenda. Engaging specific stakeholders, "intra-agencies" (civil society bodies, private sector representatives, and other interested groups at national level), and citizens in regional integration is built into the EAC culture. Article 71 1(f) of the 2009 Treaty requires that the Secretariat promotes and disseminates information on EAC to the public and stakeholders, in the region and beyond. EAC emphasizes the need to localize integration by involving the widest possible range of stakeholders at all levels, from the bottom up, starting in partner states. The Heads of State as well as the Council of Ministers recognize the importance of enhancing communication capacities. The Council has often underlined the importance of establishing mechanisms to communicate with the public (for example, EAC 2005).

Following a review initiated in 2009, a communication strategy was designed to inform and guide the participation of multiple stakeholders in EAC integration. Recognizing that inclusiveness is critical, the strategy covers public and nonstate actors alike. It pursues a two-step approach: Initial collaboration with EAC institutions, media, civil society bodies, and with the private sector, leads to their disseminating and exchanging information broadly.

Quarterly monitoring and reporting inform decision makers on the trends and the effectiveness of the strategy (EAC 2014a).

In 2012 EAC adopted a Consultative Dialogue Framework for the private sector, civil society organizations, and other interest groups to implement the requirements of Articles 127–129 of the Treaty.

Finally, a dialogue framework strengthens partnerships and promotes collaboration within partner states in areas tied to regional integration (EAC 2012).

Integration dialogue as a bottom-up tool

Dialogue at the national level is coordinated through the Ministry of East African Community Affairs (MEACA), which has an office in each partner state. MEACA is responsible for mobilizing and engaging key stakeholders to implement regional integration plans and programs. It works with a raft of national actors, to raise awareness and promote citizen participation in dialogue (EAC 2012). The in-country MEACA offices apply the EAC communications strategy to the context and needs of each partner state.

MEACA coordinates outreach programs with the EAC Secretariat. For example, during the parliamentary session in partner states, MEACA and the EAC mission organize a two-week program in each state to raise awareness on important issues of regional integration. Through this exercise integration success stories are gathered and communicated to Members of Parliament, and the mission team highlights ECA-relevant legislation that Parliament is required to act upon.

The two-week program goes beyond mere lobbying and advocacy; it is a genuine attempt to bring the role of the EAC Parliament home to the national level. The mission team and MEACA organize a four-day meeting with national policy makers—particularly ministers, the permanent secretary, key civil society bodies, and the private sector—to recap

on the status of implementation. Regular face-to-face discussions are held between EAC delegates and line ministries, such as infrastructure, meteorological, transport, and telecommunications, to discuss issues on transborder projects.

MEACA encourages bottom-up citizen engagement through the intra-agencies. National consultative meetings are organized in advance, before the regional meetings. Civil society bodies conduct consultations through their networks at the sub-national level. Issues raised at the local level are combined and presented as national issues to the Regional Dialogue Committee. Dialogue at national and subnational levels is usually issue specific, addressing EAC integration proposals and issues affecting the local level.

Issues raised at national level become the agenda for regional consultative meetings. The Regional Dialogue Committee harmonizes issues from all member states as they prepare for the regional dialogues. For these dialogues, apex bodies are drawn from each partner state, representatives of trade unions; regional civil society bodies; employees’ associations; the private sector; regional professional bodies; EAC forums for women, business, youth, and people with disabilities; investment groups; media; and other interest groups such as those concerned with private-public taxation.

A regional dialogue is held four times a year. Representatives from the dialogues participate in the annual Secretary General’s Forum, where with the Secretariat they draw up the agenda for the EAC’s decision-making bodies to take further action.

The heart of this consultative process is a multi-directional flow of communication. The voice of the people underlies the planning process, as well as policy setting and revising, and other legislative tools. Communication makes it possible for the apex bodies to monitor, follow up, and provide feedback on policy implementation in partner states.

Reaching out to specific targets

EAC institutions create formal and informal venues to encourage African experts to take part in developing and implementing regional integration. In marketing terms, EAC’s specialized institutions (table 1) provide frameworks for such target audiences across member states. These institutions are not just recipients of information—they are proactive players, reaching out to given targets.

Table 1. Specialized institutions and their targets

EAC institution	Target
East African Business Council	Business people, through different business chambers in each member state, circulate information and engage in discussion through their networks
East African Law Society	Judges, attorneys, and other legal practitioners
East African Jua Kali Association	Small businesspeople and entrepreneurs
East Africa Local Government Association	Technical and policy makers at subnational levels
Development partners	Provide funds to bring the EAC integration message to member states through grassroots initiatives
EAC embassies	Disseminate information about EAC integration to countries, and connect EAC with the diaspora
Centers of Excellence and Commissions	Specialized health institutions and professionals, for example kidney ailments, cancer, and nutrition; Kiswahili; research; and science and technology
The Inter-University Council of East Africa	Students, researchers, and teaching staff

Forums along business, religious, and social development lines in EAC offer stakeholders the opportunity to communicate face to face and informally. Examples include the East African Petroleum Conference and Exhibition, the Annual East African Health and Scientific Conference and International Health Exhibition and Trade Fair, the EAC Secretary General’s Forum for the Private Sector, investment conferences, the EAC Forum for Ministers of Social Development, civil society gatherings, and the EAC Conference on Inter-Religious Collaboration for Regional Peace and Security to mention a few.

These meetings touch on integration challenges, articulate needs, and demand accountability from political and technical leaders, with people sharing a common environment and cause.

One such increasingly important event is the Jumuiya Festival, a biannual event that rotates through each partner state. The first was held in Rwanda in 2013; the Kenyan government hosted the most recent (2015) in Nairobi. The festival celebrates all aspects of East African culture—food, sport, dance, music, and fashion as well as other cultural elements. It provides an opportunity for EAC citizens to come together to share their common symbols, including the EAC national anthem and the Kiswahili language. Thus while celebrating national differences, the festival promotes “oneness” as people of the East African Community.

Such newsworthy outreach events are well covered by national media and disseminated to the public through newspapers and prime-time radio and television programs. They also result in a flurry of social media engagement.

Communication opportunities are also found in cross-border interaction, as expedited through the establishment of the Customs Union and Common Market, and freedom of movement of people, goods, services, and capital. As businesspeople, traders, students, and professionals in different fields and individuals from different states find it easier to cross borders, interaction with others in

partner states increases, and with it exchanges of information and sharing of views.

To support such liberalization, EAC educates citizens about key milestones of integration—for example using traditional media (radio and TV), outdoor billboards, and social media. The central message is that support of the free movement of people and goods and encouraging interaction helps overcome political, social, and ethnic differences, and fosters the commonality that is essential if the goal of East African political federation is to be achieved.

EAC promotes integration by collaborating in firms’ social responsibility initiatives. One example is Tusker Project Fame sponsored by East African Breweries Limited. This program brings together music contestants from partner states. Another is through inter-university intellectual competitions sponsored across the East African region by Zain, the mobile network currently operating under the Airtel Brand. Then there is the Tegla Lerupe Peace Run, which attracts runners from different tribal backgrounds of Kenya, Sudan, Uganda, and other countries. Originally supported by Kenya Airways in association with the Tegla Lerupe Peace Foundation, the run has become a major sporting event attracting other sponsors and significant international support.

EAC takes advantage of these and other social responsibility structures and marketing programs, and works with firms such as EAC airlines, transborder bus and transport businesses, and telecoms and other firms (EAC 2012).

Inclusive engagement to achieve integration

The Forum on the Role of Women, the Youth Forum, and the People with Disability Forum provide platforms for these groups—often excluded from participating in development dialogue—to discuss how integration affects them, to learn about opportunities and benefits, and to propose bills and policies to ensure that they can have their voice heard.

The Youth Platform, coordinated through the Nyerere Center for Peace and Research, focuses on public speaking, organizing debates for young people, particularly university students, on issues of governance, human rights, leadership, and political transparency. Six winners are selected and entrusted with the “ambassadorial” role of forming university clubs to engage students in their partner states. Debates do not end with the competition but are continued through an online youth platform moderated by the ambassadorial team.

That team sensitizes fellow students and advocates for issues on effective leadership and good governance, in their own languages and setting their own terms. They also disseminate knowledge more broadly, not only to young people but also to the general public through interviews with politicians, decision makers, and technocrats.

The ambassadorial team initiative is part of the Youth Networks, which have more than 6,000 university students in 22 EAC Youth Clubs in partner state universities. Recognizing the importance of engaging youth, the EAC has also introduced integration clubs in secondary schools. It began with the Ministry of East African Affairs in Rwanda, which championed this club framework. The clubs also build student capacity in competitive spirit-building, public speaking, and life-skills through debates and interaction. They also encourage small groups of young people to get involved in regional integration issues, and help equip them to contribute to overall regional development (MEACA 2014). These mentorship forums groom students for good governance, preparing them to lead the next generation.

Media are key partners in integration

EAC’s policy makers recognize that mass media must be special partners to advance the integration process to all stakeholders in the region and beyond. It is expected that support for public awareness through TV and radio will be included in the 2016/17 EAC budget.

A study on capacities at the interface of planning and implementation, conducted in seven Sub-Saharan countries, recognized that communication is a skill required to empower citizens and enable them to take responsibility to address development challenges, articulate their needs, and demand accountability from political leaders and technical advisors (NEPAD Agency 2012). Access to and the sharing of information in a two-way engagement is also critical to ensure transparency in managing development.

A study by Abdalla (2015) on the role of print media in promoting integration generally agrees with an EAC review (EAC 2012) that some newspapers offer little information on the EAC integration agenda.

To strengthen its communication role and to engage the public and other stakeholders more fully, EAC is expanding media partnerships. One example is a program to empower and educate media on the integration process through which 150 journalists—50 from each partner state—are being recruited to bring EAC closer to citizens. Each journalist must commit to prepare at least one news item or article every two weeks (EAC 2014b).

Another initiative is the annual presentation by the East African Business Council (EABC) of media awards in the following areas:

- EAC Secretary General's Award (overall winner).
- EABC Chairman's Award (business reporting).
- Green Award (environment reporting).
- Higher Education Reporting Award.
- Political Reporting Award.
- Agriculture and Food Security Award.
- Photography Award.
- Health Reporting Award.
- Women Economic Empowerment Award.

These awards are intended to reinforce the critical role the media can play in driving the integration agenda. They also recognize journalists’ contributions and encourage journalistic talents across all media platforms (EAC 2014b). EAC has also identified “focal” journalists in private and

government-owned major media in each partner state.

Of all RECs on the continent, EAC has made the most progress in using social media (NEPAD Agency 2014). It is also more advanced than the Caribbean Community and Common Market on this measure. EAC's website goes beyond providing visibility to serve as a knowledge exchange platform for EAC plans, strategies, and events; it also provides studies and evaluation reports on integration matters. The knowledge exchange function is integrated between social media and the website, and EAC has designated people specifically to monitor and run blogs and social media.

As of July, 2015 EAC had 13,254 Twitter followers, 4,266 Facebook page likes, and 4,865 Facebook group members. These figures do not include social media run by EAC specialized institutions. For example, in the same month, the East African Court of Justice had 400 Facebook friends and Twitter followers. More innovative ways to use mobile phones and roadshows are being designed and planned for implementation during the 2016/17 budget year to increase one-to-one connectivity, particularly in rural areas.

It is important for the EAC Secretariat to provide harmonized messaging aligning with key priorities. Beyond that, EAC has focused on designing communications that enhance collaboration among staff at all levels, increase synergies between different organs, and align functions between specialized institutions and the Secretariat. Messages are kept simple and focus on how people will benefit from the integration; how business people can benefit from a single currency; and what one-stop border or free movement of people means to parents, students, small businesses, farmers, and so on.

Internal communication

EAC understands the importance of sharing information on integration among its executive, professional, and support staff.

Its intranet is the most commonly used tool for the Secretariat. Staff members can share information horizontally, with staff within a department, from directorate to directorate, or vertically, from staff to the executives and vice versa. Information is also shared through forums that bring together directors and technical staff, and through newsletters and periodicals.

Technology is not without drawbacks. A recent review found that EAC staff members are in danger of becoming faceless as most interaction occurs online, reducing face-to-face meetings (EAC 2015c). In response, EAC has introduced "spaces" for employees throughout the Secretariat to take ownership of the integration process by closely examining why and what they do, to communicate issues on the vision, and to tie them to their individual roles. EAC has introduced a quarterly State of the Community experience at which the Secretary General reviews the status of integration—highlighting recent achievements—and facilitates a dialogue that involves the entire organization.

EAC has also introduced refresher courses in leadership, conducted either online or onsite. They are designed to strengthen the leadership skills of employees and empower them to live up to the EAC brand, vision, and values.

An "Integration Café" has been set up to provide opportunities for staff to connect, share concerns, identify gaps, and socialize informally. It offers a wide variety of activities such as team building, family sport, and fun days. It also creates an environment for employees to be heard and executives to learn to listen. Such a forum helps move the institution from being a faceless organization to one that builds reciprocal relationships and emphasizes accountability. As a part of the Integration Café, team-building meetings are organized monthly for directors, heads of department, and principal desk officers to foster interdepartmental linkages and support synergies for upcoming events and activities across directorates and sectors.

To strengthen the connection of employees to the integration agenda, EAC is establishing a framework for the Open Door & Heart Policy to encourage staff to mix informally with the leadership during set hours. This concept will also include “Management by Walking Around,” as executive directors and heads of department informally visit and talk with staff in EAC offices. In addition, a communal coffee and tea area has been set up.

Also important for annual planning and budget-making is a participatory communications process that directly involves EAC staff members from the outset. Under this process, consultative meetings take place within the departments and sections on the annual planning in advance of the Annual Planning Retreat for Executive and Professional Staff; this occurs either at the beginning of the financial year or before the budget is passed by the East African Legislative Assembly.

Through a Program Contract System, staff members have a “silent week” with their directors to assess performance against roles and duties stipulated in their contracts. The system not only allows technical staff to discuss professional and personal needs with their supervisors but helps them see how much they contribute to integration. In addition, the Human Resource Department conducts monthly or quarterly staff meetings to collect staff views on what can be done to boost staff morale; these ideas are then added to the agenda of executive meetings so that appropriate action can be taken.

Outcomes and overall assessment

Throughout EAC, communication is essential for leaders to provide responsible and responsive direction. Communication is integrated into almost every point of the institution’s operation, internal and external. But rather than a tool used only to manage crises or restore image within EAC, communication is a leadership tool that is used from the planning stage through implementation to further integration and achieve development results.

Mixing social and traditional media has enabled EAC to magnify its messaging on integration. This is the logical extension of the mandate laid down in the communications strategy to direct messages through multiple channels to leverage citizen engagement.

Engagement of state and nonstate actors is embedded in the culture of leadership and in EAC’s legal foundation. One officer interviewed said that it is unlikely that the Council of Ministers or the Head of the States Summit would pass a policy or plan one that did not have the inclusive support and commitment to active involvement from state and nonstate actors in all partner states.

EAC’s emphasis on communication to ensure inclusive engagement has brought many benefits: It has bridged age, gender, and social differences; enhanced performance and accountability; and enabled stakeholders and staff members to generate innovative and successful solutions. The emphasis on inclusive engagement is helping build the capacity of both state and nonstate actors to demand better integration results.

The engagement of stakeholders across partner states is building their capacity to “own” the integration agenda. Because they are part of the architecture of annual integration planning, they accept the responsibility of monitoring the implementation in their own and in partner states. These multiple stakeholders also demand results from those who are entrusted to manage the implementation of the overall development agenda including the integration process. Communication to engage stakeholders is a key capacity required to enhance citizen leadership.

Feedback is essential to enhancing the effectiveness of EAC’s management and delivery of integration. In a survey 90 percent of respondents said they were aware of EAC programs, and 75 percent had a positive image toward the institution. Maintaining this positive public image is critical to securing constructive stakeholder action. People are most

likely to commit their time, talents, and treasure when they believe in something.

The integration agenda has been localized through reaching out to like-minded groups and individuals and the general public. For the most part, EAC communication avoids broad generic messaging and explicitly focuses on benefits of integration to particular individuals and groups. Important information is not announced through press conferences at the EAC Secretariat but is put out in partner states. EAC events held in different countries may be all about the business of integration, but even then outreach focuses on individuals and groups as citizens of the partner state rather than as citizens of the community at large. Coupling local side events with official EAC meetings has proven to be an astute way to focus media attention on the relevance of EAC in the local community in local languages and with local cultural references.

Festivals and other opportunities to celebrate the benefits of integration and facilitate interaction between community members and leaders are also important. These are building blocks toward creating a common structure under EAC symbols. Further support for integration is also achieved through promotion of affinity forums (women, youth, and persons with disabilities), the in-country East Africa Ministry of African Affairs' office, and ambassadorial teams and EAC integration clubs.

The EAC has carefully thought out its communication priorities, recognizing the high costs involved. Those responsible for oversight of the communications strategy attempt to add value, often choosing less costly editorial-based coverage than expensive advertising. Becoming involved with businesses, companies, and events in the region that have a non-EAC primary focus not only cuts costs but also introduces sustainability for the communications strategy.

EAC communication has succeeded most when it has supported bottom-up processes, rather than imposing them from the top. Where it has fostered community participation, stakeholders have

generally accepted their responsibility to engage in the development process, whether to advance integration or for other results.

While the EAC communications strategy employs results-based management to monitor and control predicted indicators, it also has adopted results-based learning. Through quarterly progress reports, leaders and stakeholders monitor results and adapt along the way. For example, one result of continuous assessment is that EAC is revamping the East African Broadcasting Network to develop the East African Broadcasting Corporation as a medium for broadcasting on behalf of EAC to the world (EAC 2015).

Despite successes, EAC recognizes that greater human and financial capacity to support communication will be critical if the institution is to continue engaging fully with citizens and stakeholders in East Africa, particularly those in rural areas.

Conclusions

Communication is at the center of EAC planning and implementation of development goals. It is a tool to engage stakeholders and citizens across the partner states to own and drive the integration agenda.

Lessons learned

1. Proper and clear communication is vital for rallying different stakeholders to support the integration agenda. Well implemented, communication is a leadership tool to manage an integration process effectively.
2. It is essential to use communication to manage results, not crises.
3. Political will is a cornerstone for the success of communication to engage citizens. Political will ensures that the support essential to building and sustaining capacity is put in place.
4. Full exploitation of ever-changing technologies along with skillful use of traditional media is essential for leaders.
5. Communication is far more than the dissemination of information. Engagement of stakeholders and citizens to commit to results is essential. This includes engagement with like-

minded groups and individuals, and simultaneously reaching out to the public. Ideally, engagement to manage results demands a bottom-up approach that begins in partner states.

6. Face-to-face interactions are critical for teambuilding and developing a direct response to integration planning. Creation of places to network and make direct human ties is essential to help people put cultural and political differences behind them and to bond as one people of the EAC.
7. Internal communication is necessary for the Secretariat to enable professional and executive staff to achieve desired integration results.
8. Constant reporting is essential to increase the ability of stakeholders and leaders to learn from what is happening and to improve working practices and results.

Policy recommendations

1. The EAC and other African RECs need to establish robust and creative communication strategies as a benchmark for achieving development results.
2. The EAC and other African RECs should ensure that the communication strategies incorporate a consultative dialogue framework.
3. The EAC and other African RECs should build a robust communications strategy into the legal framework of every REC—not as an “add-on.” This is important to ensure that it will be incorporated into short-and-long-term planning.
4. The EAC and other African RECs need to establish mechanisms for prioritization, evaluation, reporting, and fixing areas that do not have remarkable performance as part of planning and implementing policies.
5. The EAC and other African RECs need to set up systems to facilitate free access to and sharing of information of stakeholders, including those in rural areas.
6. The EAC and other African RECs should set apart financial resources to strengthen the communications strategy and consultative framework.
7. The African Capacity Building Foundation and partners need to support the African RECs in areas of adequate communication systems and policies for effective communication with

member states and staff for effective management of regional processes as well as achievement of regional integration outcomes.

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