

- Market price information (mentioned in 6/8 FGDs): "Knowing market prices helps us decide when and where to sell our crops" (Male farmer, Dikwa)

Language and Cultural Relevance

- 89% of FGD participants underscored the importance of local language broadcasting.
- Farmers valued culturally relevant examples and local success stories.
- "When they speak in Hausa and use examples from our area, we understand better" (Female farmer, Damasak).

Accessibility and Timing

- Early morning programs (5-8 AM) were most popular as they align with farming schedules.
- Battery-powered radios facilitated access even during power outages.
- "We listen while preparing for farm work in the morning" (Male farmer, Biu).

Interactive Features

- Farmers valued call-in programs and SMS feedback options.
- Question-and-answer sessions were particularly appreciated.
- "When other farmers ask questions, we all learn together" (Male farmer, Monguno).

Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges Identified Table 5 presents the main challenges encountered by farmers in accessing and utilizing community radio agricultural programmes.

Table 5: Challenges in Accessing Community Radio Programs (N=400)

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
Technical Issues		
Poor signal quality	156	39.0
Radio equipment problems	89	22.3
Battery/power issues	67	16.8
Content-Related Issues		
Programs not at convenient times	134	33.5
Limited program duration	98	24.5
Lack of follow-up information	78	19.5
Economic Constraints		
Cannot afford radio	45	11.3
Battery costs	123	30.8
Social/Cultural Barriers		
Language barriers	34	8.5
Gender restrictions	23	5.8

Opportunities for Enhancement

Key informant interviews with radio station managers and agricultural extension workers highlighted several opportunities:

- **Programme Timing Optimization:** Adjusting broadcast schedules to align with farming calendars and daily routines.
- **Interactive Technology Integration:** Expanding SMS-based question services and farmer feedback systems.
- **Content Localization:** Developing more location-specific content addressing local crops and challenges.
- **Partnership Development:** Strengthening collaboration between radio stations and agricultural extension services.
- **Community Engagement:** Establishing farmer listening groups to enhance programme impact.

Impact on Agricultural Productivity

Farmers who regularly listened to agricultural radio programmes reported measurable improvements:

- **Yield Increases:** 67% reported improved crop yields (average increase of 23%).
- **Cost Reduction:** 54% reported reduced input costs through better pest management.
- **Income Enhancement:** 43% reported increased income from better market timing.
- **Risk Mitigation:** 71% reported better preparedness for weather-related challenges.

Statistical analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between radio programmes exposure and self-reported agricultural productivity improvements ($r=0.634$, $p<0.001$).

Findings and Discussion

Community Radio as an Effective Agricultural Extension Tool

The findings of this study provide evidences that community radio broadcasting serves as an effective agricultural extension tool in Borno State, Nigeria. The significant differences in agricultural knowledge scores between regular listeners (56.9/70) and occasional/rare listeners (40.2/70) demonstrate the substantial impact of radio-based agricultural programming on farmer education. This 41% knowledge gap underscores the effectiveness of community radio in bridging information deficits that have persisted due to disrupted traditional extension services.

These results align with international evidence from similar contexts. Chapman et al. (2003) found comparable knowledge improvements among farmers exposed to radio-based agricultural programming in Northern Ghana, while Mittal and Mehar (2012) documented similar positive outcomes in India. However, the magnitude of impact observed in Borno State (with effect sizes ranging from 11.23 to 17.89 across different knowledge domains) suggests that community radio may be particularly effective in conflict-affected areas where alternative information sources are severely limited.

The adoption rates of improved agricultural practices provide further validation of radio's effectiveness. The finding that 81.5% of regular listeners adopted improved seed varieties compared to 49.6% of occasional listeners represents a practically significant difference that translates to real agricultural improvements. Similarly, the 73.9% adoption rate of pest control methods among regular listeners versus 30.1% among occasional listeners shows how radio programming can drive change beyond mere knowledge acquisition.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support Rogers' (2003) Diffusion of Innovation Theory. Community radio appears to function effectively as a mass communication channel that creates awareness and knowledge about agricultural innovations, subsequently catalysing interpersonal communication within farming communities. The high adoption rates suggest that radio exposure not only informs farmers but also influences their decision-making processes regarding new agricultural practices.

Addressing Information Gaps in Conflict-Affected Areas

The study reveals that community radio broadcasting serves a critical function in addressing information gaps created by the Boko Haram insurgency in north-eastern Nigeria. Traditional agricultural extension services, which rely heavily on face-to-face interactions between extension agents and farmers, have been severely disrupted since 2009. The finding that 71.8% of farmers regularly listen to agricultural programs demonstrates the medium's strong accessibility and acceptance in areas where conventional extension workers cannot safely operate.

The effectiveness of radio in conflict-affected areas stem from several unique advantages revealed in this study. First, radio signals can reach geographically isolated or insecure areas that extension agents cannot access, as evidenced by the high listenership rates across all four study LGAs. Second, battery-powered radios remain functional despite unreliable electricity supply, with 85.5% of farmers owning radios and successfully accessing programming. Third, radio programming can be rapidly adapted to address changing security and agricultural conditions, providing timely information that static extension materials cannot offer.

The impact on agricultural productivity provides evidence of radio's practical value in conflict settings. The reported yield increases (67% of regular listeners experiencing an average 23% improvement) and cost reductions (54% reporting reduced input costs) demonstrate that radio-based agricultural information translates to tangible economic benefits. This is particularly significant in a region where agricultural productivity has declined due to conflict-related disruptions. These findings contribute to understanding how alternative communication channels can maintain agricultural development momentum despite security challenges. The success of community radio in Borno State suggests that information and communication technology interventions can provide resilient alternatives to traditional extension systems in conflict-affected regions across sub-Saharan Africa.

Language and Cultural Relevance

The findings underscore the critical importance of language and cultural relevance in agricultural communication. The preference for Hausa language programming (47.3% of farmers) and the emphasis on local language broadcasting in focus group discussions (89% of participants) demonstrate that linguistic accessibility is fundamental to effective agricultural extension through radio.

The qualitative findings revealed that cultural relevance extends beyond language to include locally appropriate examples, regional success stories, and farming practices adapted to local conditions. Farmers' appreciation for "culturally relevant examples and local success stories" indicates that effective agricultural communication must be contextualized within local farming systems and cultural frameworks. This aligns with Development Media Theory's emphasis on participatory communication that engages community members in their own development process.

The timing preferences revealed in the study (44.5% preferring early morning broadcasts) reflect the cultural and practical realities of farming communities. By aligning broadcast schedules with farmers' daily routines, community radio demonstrates cultural sensitivity that enhances program effectiveness. This finding supports the theoretical premise that successful development communication must be grounded in local contexts and responsive to community needs.

The interactive features valued by farmers, particularly call-in programs and question-and-answer sessions, illustrate the importance of two-way communication in agricultural extension. The finding that farmers appreciate learning from each other's questions reflects the communal nature of knowledge sharing in rural African communities. This participatory approach distinguishes community radio from top-down broadcasting models and contributes to its effectiveness as an extension tool.

Sustainability and Scalability Considerations

The study reveals both opportunities and challenges for the long-term sustainability and scalability of community radio as an agricultural extension tool. The high levels of farmer engagement (58.5% listening daily, 71.8% regularly exposed to agricultural programmes) suggest strong community demand that supports sustainability. However, the challenges identified, which includes technical issues affecting 39% of farmers and economic constraints limiting 30.8% due to battery costs, highlight some barriers to long-term viability.

The technical challenges, particularly poor signal quality affecting 39% of respondents, point to infrastructure limitations that require sustained investment. The finding that

22.3% of farmers experience radio equipment problems suggests the need for ongoing technical support and equipment maintenance programs.

These infrastructure requirements have implications for the financial sustainability of community radio stations, particularly in resource-constrained environments.

Economic sustainability emerges as a critical factor, with battery costs affecting nearly one-third of farmers and radio ownership remaining challenging for 11.3% of the population. These findings suggest that sustainable community radio models may require subsidized access or alternative power solutions to ensure continued farmer participation. The integration of solar charging systems or community listening centres could address these economic barriers while maintaining programme reach.

The opportunities for enhancement identified through key informant interviews provide a roadmap for scaling successful community radio models. Programme timing optimization, interactive technology integration, and content localization represent relatively low-cost interventions that could significantly enhance impact. The proposal for establishing farmer listening groups offers a scalable approach to amplifying radio's reach while building local capacity for agricultural knowledge sharing.

Partnership development between radio stations and agricultural extension services presents particular promise for sustainability and scalability. By integrating community radio into existing extension frameworks rather than operating as parallel systems, programmes can leverage existing expertise while expanding reach. This integration model could be replicated across other regions facing similar challenges, providing a template for scaling community radio-based agricultural extension.

The positive correlation between radio exposure and agricultural productivity improvements ($r=0.634$, $p<0.001$) provides evidence of the medium's economic value, which supports arguments for continued investment in community radio infrastructure. The documented income enhancements (43% of regular listeners reporting increased income) suggest that community radio programmes can generate sufficient economic returns to justify their costs, both for individual farmers and for broader development investments.

From a policy perspective, the study's findings support the integration of community radio into national agricultural extension strategies. The Borno State Government's investment in four community radio stations through NERI demonstrates the potential for government-led scaling of successful models. However, the sustainability of such investments depends on continued political support, adequate funding, and effective program management—factors that require careful attention in scaling efforts. The findings thus, suggest that community radio's effectiveness may be particularly

pronounced in conflict-affected areas where traditional extension services are disrupted. This context-specific advantage has implications for targeting scaling efforts towards regions experiencing similar challenges. However, the medium's broader applicability to rural development contexts beyond conflict settings requires further investigation to determine optimal deployment strategies.

Conclusions

Based on the research findings, community radio broadcasting demonstrates significant potential as an effective tool for agricultural extension in conflict-affected areas. The study reveals that farmers who regularly listen to agricultural programmes on community radio stations show improved knowledge of modern farming techniques and are more likely to adopt recommended practices.

Recommendations for Policy Makers:

- Increase investment in community radio infrastructure as part of agricultural development strategies.
- Develop supportive policies for community radio operations in rural areas.
- Integrate community radio into national agricultural extension frameworks.

Recommendations for Radio Station Managers:

- Develop programming schedules that align with farmers' daily routines.
- Increase use of local languages and culturally relevant content.
- Establish feedback mechanisms to ensure programs meet farmers' needs.

Recommendations for Agricultural Extension Services:

- Partner with community radio stations to enhance reach and impact.
- Provide technical support for agricultural content development.
- Use radio as a platform for two-way communication with farming communities.

Recommendation for Future Research:

- Conduct longitudinal studies to assess long-term impacts on agricultural productivity.
- Investigate cost-effectiveness compared to traditional extension methods.
- Explore integration of digital technologies with community radio broadcasting.

Limitations

This study focuses specifically on Borno State and may not be generalizable to other regions with different socio-economic and security contexts. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between radio exposure and agricultural knowledge improvements. Future longitudinal studies would provide stronger evidence of impact.

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DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION AND WELFARE: PERCEPTION OF PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS ON THE STRATEGIES OF THE NASARAWA STATE DISABILITY RIGHTS COMMISSION

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Abstract

This study investigates the perceptions of people with special needs (PWSN) regarding the communication strategies of the Nasarawa State Disability Rights Commission (NSDRC) in disseminating welfare information. The objective was to examine the inclusiveness, accessibility, and effectiveness of these strategies from the perspective of the beneficiaries. A mixed-methods design was adopted, combining a quantitative survey of 373 distributed questionnaires (368 valid responses) with eight Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) involving NSDRC officials and disability cluster leaders across the three senatorial zones of the state. Guided by the Social Model of Disability and Participatory Communication Theory, the study found that only 39% of respondents were aware of NSDRC's programmes, while over 54% reported that its communication channels were hardly accessible. Key challenges identified include the absence of sign language interpreters, limited braille materials, weak community consultation, and poor digital inclusion arising from low literacy and infrastructural deficits. The study concludes that these shortcomings stem from institutional and structural barriers rather than individual impairments, thereby affirming the Social Model of Disability. It recommends the adoption of participatory, multimodal, and disability-sensitive communication approaches, alongside strengthened community engagement and feedback mechanisms.

Keywords: Disability; Communication Strategies; Accessibility; Participation; Inclusion.

Introduction

Disability inclusion has become a global priority, recognised as both a human rights obligation and a cornerstone of sustainable development. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2018) estimates that approximately 15% of the global population over one billion people live with some form of disability, positioning persons with disabilities (PWDs) as one of the world's largest minority groups. For these individuals, communication transcends the mere exchange of information; it is a vital instrument for empowerment, participation, and access to essential services (Brown, 2019). Inclusive communication enables people with special needs (PWSN) to exercise their rights and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Conversely, inaccessible communication systems perpetuate exclusion, reinforce stigma, and restrict access to welfare and development programmes, reflecting the Social Model of Disability's view that societal barriers, not individual impairments, create disability (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 2018).

In Nigeria, the passage of the *Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act* of 2018 represented a significant milestone in promoting disability rights. The legislation mandates equal access to education, employment, healthcare, transportation, and communication, thereby providing a legal foundation for inclusion (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2018). To operationalise these provisions at state level, several states, including Nasarawa, established disability rights commissions. The Nasarawa State Disability Rights Commission (NSDRC) was founded to safeguard the rights and welfare of PWSN and to mainstream inclusion within public policy and development planning. However, as Asemah (2011) and Oso and Pate (2011) caution, legislative frameworks alone are insufficient without effective, audience-centred communication strategies that translate policy commitments into public awareness and behavioural change.

Although such institutional advances, PWSN in Nigeria continue to encounter significant communication barriers. Many public agencies, including disability commissions, rely on top-down, non-inclusive communication practices that fail to address diverse disability needs (Eze, 2020). While radio and television remain the dominant channels for disseminating welfare information, they often lack accessibility features such as sign language interpretation, braille translations, or audio descriptions (Oyedele & Adebayo, 2021). Digital platforms also face structural challenges poor internet connectivity, high data costs, and low digital literacy particularly in rural areas (Smith & Olowu, 2023). These constraints mirror the Social Model's argument that exclusion arises from systemic and institutional shortcomings rather than from personal limitations.

Communication scholarship stresses accessibility, inclusivity, and participation as prerequisites for effective engagement. Participatory Communication Theory, rooted in

Freire's (1970) pedagogy of dialogue and contextualised for Africa by Soola (2002), asserts that marginalised groups must co-create messages to ensure relevance and sustainability. Nigerian scholars such as Ekeanyanwu and Okoro (2013) note that one-way communication models neglect local contexts and audience agency, thereby weakening impact. In disability communication, this implies that strategies designed without the involvement of PWSN risk being exclusionary and ineffective (Asemah et al., 2013).

Both local and international studies highlight persistent gaps in disability-inclusive communication. Eze (2020) critiques the "one-size-fits-all" approach that disregards variations in disability types, while Oyedele and Adebayo (2021) show that the absence of accessible formats reduces awareness and participation. Globally, Brown (2019) argues that communication becomes empowering only when it dismantles structural inequalities. Within Nigeria, Nwabueze (2014) and Ojebuyi and Salawu (2017) contend that public information systems often reproduce social hierarchies, raising questions about whether disability commissions like the NSDRC are challenging or perpetuating such patterns.

Nasarawa State provides a useful case study for exploring these dynamics. With its mix of urban and rural communities and active disability clusters, the state offers a microcosm of subnational disability communication in Nigeria. Yet, limited empirical research has examined how PWSN perceive the NSDRC's communication strategies. This study therefore seeks to fill that gap by assessing the inclusiveness of communication formats, the accessibility of dissemination channels, and the effectiveness of these strategies in promoting empowerment and social inclusion. By employing a mixed-methods approach, it integrates quantitative and qualitative insights to contribute to scholarly debates and inform policy practice. Ultimately, the study aims to ensure that communication practices align with the rights-based and participatory principles necessary to translate legal commitments into lived realities for PWSN in Nasarawa State.

Statement of the Problem

Over the past decade, Nigeria has made notable progress in promoting disability rights, particularly through the *Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act* of 2018, which guarantees equal access to education, employment, healthcare, and communication (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2018). In Nasarawa State, the establishment of the Nasarawa State Disability Rights Commission (NSDRC) represents an effort to operationalise these protections by promoting the welfare and inclusion of people with special needs (PWSN). However, despite these policy advances, many PWSN remain excluded from welfare programmes due to ineffective and poorly designed communication strategies. As Brown (2019) notes, communication is not merely a vehicle for information dissemination but a key instrument for ensuring accessibility, inclusivity, and active

participation. Without deliberate efforts to adapt messages and channels to the diverse needs of disability groups, the rights enshrined in law remain largely theoretical (Shakespeare, 2018).

Empirical evidence exposes considerable weaknesses in NSDRC's communication practices. The Commission depends heavily on conventional media such as radio and television, which, although widely available, often lack disability-friendly features like sign language interpretation, captions for the semi-literate, or audio descriptions for the visually impaired (Oyedele & Adebayo, 2021). Similarly, the potential of digital platforms is limited by systemic barriers, including low internet penetration, limited digital literacy, and the high cost of smart devices, particularly in rural communities (Smith & Olowu, 2023). These limitations reflect the Social Model of Disability, which attributes exclusion to institutional and environmental barriers rather than individual impairments (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 2018). As a result, welfare programmes intended to empower PWSN are underutilised, leaving many beneficiaries uninformed and marginalised (Eze, 2020).

This persistent disconnection between policy intent and lived reality raises important questions about the effectiveness of the NSDRC's communication strategies. While the Commission assumes that its use of mass and digital media guarantees broad outreach, evidence suggests otherwise. As Asemah et al. (2013) argue, communication strategies that disregard audience diversity and accessibility tend to reinforce exclusion rather than dismantle it. Furthermore, the absence of participatory approaches, as advocated by Participatory Communication Theory (Freire, 1970; Thomas, 2021), exacerbates the problem by excluding disability clusters from co-designing and evaluating communication initiatives. Understanding how PWSN perceive these strategies is therefore essential to identifying institutional shortcomings and charting pathways for reform. This study consequently seeks to evaluate the inclusiveness, accessibility, and effectiveness of the NSDRC's communication strategies, with the ultimate goal of fostering equitable and participatory communication frameworks for people with special needs in Nasarawa State.

Literature Review

Awareness is the cornerstone of disability inclusion, as it determines whether the rights enshrined in legislation, such as Nigeria's *Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act* (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2018), translate into tangible opportunities. McQuail (2010) describes communication as more than information transmission it is a dynamic process that shapes perception, influences attitudes, and motivates action. For people with special needs (PWSN), awareness of disability institutions and their programmes is essential to claiming entitlements and accessing resources (Brown, 2019).

However, empirical studies consistently reveal low awareness of disability commissions in Nigeria, exposing systemic weaknesses in outreach.

Adedokun and Alabi (2019) observed that many PWSN were unaware of state-level disability commissions due to weak dissemination and overreliance on generic communication channels. Similarly, Adaja (2023) attributes low awareness to strategies that ignore literacy levels, local languages, and cultural contexts factors particularly critical in rural areas where structural barriers are compounded by low literacy (Ekeanyanwu & Okoro, 2013). Internationally, UNESCO (2015) stresses that awareness campaigns must adopt inclusive designs such as accessible formats and community-driven approaches to achieve meaningful engagement. In Nasarawa State, the NSDRC's reliance on radio and social media has had limited impact due to poor digital access and lack of participatory engagement (Smith & Olowu, 2023). These patterns align with the Social Model of Disability, which views exclusion as a result of structural barriers rather than personal limitations (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 2018). Furthermore, the *Agenda-Setting Theory* (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) underscores the role of media prioritisation in shaping public attention; the NSDRC's failure to leverage such agenda-setting opportunities represents a missed chance to amplify disability visibility.

Accessibility of Disability-Friendly Communication Channels

Accessibility the ability of PWSN to engage with and benefit from communication platforms is a key determinant of inclusion. Oyedele and Adebayo (2021) argue that many welfare programmes in Nigeria fail not because of poor policy design, but due to inaccessible communication frameworks that exclude PWSN. Barriers such as lack of sign language interpretation, braille publications, audio descriptions, and community-level engagement persist, particularly in rural areas (Eze, 2020a). Olowu (2017) adds that these exclusions perpetuate discriminatory attitudes and deprive PWSN of their right to information. These findings support the Social Model of Disability, which frames accessibility challenges as socially constructed and preventable (Barnes & Mercer, 2010; Shakespeare, 2018).

Comparative studies reveal that accessibility reform yields measurable improvements. In South Africa, Nkondo (2019) found that community radio incorporating disability-friendly features enhanced access to social grants. Conversely, Nigeria's continued reliance on conventional media without adaptation sidelines people with sensory or cognitive impairments (Asemah et al., 2013). In Nasarawa State, the absence of sign language, braille, and tactile materials in NSDRC communication reinforces exclusion. Although digital media holds promise, structural barriers limited connectivity, high data costs, and low digital literacy continue to limit participation (Smith & Olowu, 2023). To address this,

scholars advocate hybrid approaches that combine offline and digital tools. Soola (2002) emphasises grassroots methods such as town halls, tactile signage, and peer-led education, while UNICEF Nigeria (2023) recommends engaging community-based organisations to disseminate information in accessible formats. Rogers's (1962) *Diffusion of Innovations Theory* also supports the adoption of low-cost solutions like USSD and voice-enabled platforms to reach users with minimal digital access.

Effectiveness of Communication in Promoting Welfare Participation

Effectiveness extends beyond message transmission to the ability to stimulate awareness, participation, and empowerment. Brown (2019) defines effective communication as that which equips recipients with the agency to make informed choices, while Thomas (2021) maintains that effectiveness is greatest when communication is participatory and dialogic. In the disability context, this implies localising messages and encouraging co-creation to ensure cultural and cognitive resonance (Freire, 1970). The *Uses and Gratifications Theory* (Katz et al., 1974) further suggests that communication is most effective when it meets audience-specific needs, highlighting the importance of tailoring strategies for PWSN.

Studies across Nigeria have shown weaknesses in this area. Edewor (2018) observed that many welfare initiatives fail because communication materials overlook cultural and accessibility needs. Etieyibo and Omiegbe (2016) identified cultural prejudice and poor outreach as further obstacles, while Ojebuyi and Salawu (2017) found that top-down communication prevents feedback and limits participation. The NSDRC's reliance on non-interactive media reinforces these patterns, excluding both rural PWSN and those with sensory impairments (Eze, 2020b).

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by the *Social Model of Disability* and *Participatory Communication Theory*, which together provide a robust analytical lens for understanding communication dynamics between institutions and people with special needs (PWSN) in Nasarawa State. Both frameworks shift the emphasis from individual impairments to societal and institutional structures, underscoring inclusion and dialogue as essential to participation. Their integration enables this study to explain the communication barriers PWSN face in accessing information from the Nasarawa State Disability Rights Commission (NSDRC) and to propose pathways towards more inclusive and participatory practices.

The *Social Model of Disability*, articulated by Oliver (1990) and later expanded by Shakespeare (2018), reframes disability as a consequence of social and institutional barriers rather than a personal limitation. As Oliver (1990, p.11) defines, disability arises

from “a contemporary social organisation which takes little account of people who have impairments.” Applied to communication, the model suggests that exclusion results not from physical or sensory conditions but from the absence of accessible formats such as braille, sign language, audio descriptions, or simplified content (Barnes & Mercer, 2010). Within the NSDRC context, dependence on conventional media without adaptive features reinforces structural exclusion, validating the Social Model’s critique of institutional design (Eze, 2020). Thus, the model is particularly relevant as it conceptualises communication barriers as socially constructed and, consequently, remediable through inclusive reforms.

Complementing this, *Participatory Communication Theory* offers a framework for creating inclusive and empowering communication systems. Rooted in Freire’s (1970) pedagogy of dialogue and expanded by Thomas (2021), it advocates bottom-up, dialogic communication in which marginalised groups are co-creators of meaning rather than passive recipients. This aligns with the disability movement’s principle of “nothing about us without us” (Charlton, 1998). Applied to the NSDRC, the theory calls for engaging disability clusters, local associations, and individuals with impairments in co-designing messages, selecting appropriate channels, and institutionalising feedback (Soola, 2002). The absence of such participatory mechanisms, as observed by Asemah et al. (2013), leads to top-down communication that fails to resonate with lived realities and limits PWSN’s involvement in welfare programmes.

The two frameworks are mutually reinforcing. The *Social Model of Disability* diagnoses the structural causes of exclusion, while *Participatory Communication Theory* prescribes inclusive, community-driven solutions (Bessette, 2004). Together, they position communication as a process of empowerment and social justice rather than a technical transaction. For example, the Social Model explains why awareness of NSDRC activities remains low due to structural barriers such as the absence of sign language or braille, whereas Participatory Communication Theory proposes involving PWSN in developing accessible formats to enhance relevance and reach (Thomas, 2021).

By grounding this study in these two perspectives, the research aligns with a rights-based and development-oriented paradigm. The Social Model provides the critical lens to assess institutional exclusion, and Participatory Communication Theory offers a roadmap for transformative change. Together, they underscore the need for communication strategies that dismantle barriers, foster inclusivity, and empower PWSN to claim their rights and access welfare entitlements in Nasarawa State advancing both academic inquiry and practical policy reform.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate the perceptions of people with special needs (PWSN) regarding the communication strategies of the Nasarawa State Disability Rights Commission (NSDRC). The design combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to ensure both breadth and depth of analysis. Quantitative data provided measurable insights into awareness, accessibility, and effectiveness of communication, while qualitative data offered a more contextual understanding of the lived experiences of PWSN and the institutional dynamics shaping these experiences. This integrative approach, as Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) suggest, strengthens the validity of social research by allowing convergence between statistical evidence and narrative interpretation. In this study, a structured questionnaire formed the quantitative instrument, whereas Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with disability cluster leaders and NSDRC officials constituted the qualitative component. As Creswell (2014) notes, such methodological triangulation deepens understanding of complex human realities especially in studies addressing social inclusion and participation.

The population for this study comprised 43,129 registered PWSN in Nasarawa State, as documented by the NSDRC in 2024. This population included individuals with physical, hearing, visual, and cognitive impairments across the state's three senatorial zones Akwanga (North), Keffi (West), and Lafia (South). In addition, NSDRC officials and disability cluster leaders were included in the qualitative phase because of their roles in policy design and communication implementation (Kothari, 2004). To determine the sample size for the quantitative component, Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations was applied, using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The formula, $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e^2)}$, where $N = 43,129$ and $e = 0.05$, yielded an approximate sample size of 396, which was rounded to 381 respondents. In practice, 373 questionnaires were administered, and 368 were successfully retrieved, representing a high response rate of 98.7 per cent (Babbie, 2020).

To ensure representativeness, the study employed a stratified random sampling technique. The population was stratified by disability type, gender, residential location (urban or rural), and literacy level to reflect the diversity of PWSN and minimise sampling bias (Saunders et al., 2016). For the qualitative aspect, purposive sampling was used to select eight key informants two cluster leaders and two NSDRC officials each from Akwanga and Keffi, and four from Lafia, the state capital. This selection ensured that participants had relevant experience and insight into disability communication issues (Patton, 2015).

Two main instruments were used for data collection. The structured questionnaire captured demographic profiles, awareness levels, preferred communication channels, and perceived challenges in accessing NSDRC information. The semi-structured interview guide for the KIIs explored themes such as accessibility, institutional communication strategies, and recommendations for improvement. Both instruments were validated by three experts in communication and disability studies, ensuring content relevance and conceptual clarity. A pilot test involving 20 PWSN outside the main sample refined item wording and structure. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha produced a coefficient of 0.82, indicating strong internal consistency (Pallant, 2020).

Data analysis followed a twofold process. Quantitative data were processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26, employing descriptive statistics mainly frequencies and percentages to summarise responses and identify patterns across the three key variables of awareness, accessibility, and effectiveness (Field, 2018). The qualitative data, derived from KIIs, were transcribed verbatim and subjected to thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. This involved generating initial codes, identifying patterns, and grouping them into themes consistent with the study's objectives. Verbatim quotations from participants were used to retain authenticity and to give voice to the lived realities of PWSN (Patton, 2015). The integration of both data strands thus produced a robust and comprehensive understanding of how NSDRC's communication strategies impact awareness, accessibility, and participation among people with special needs in Nasarawa State.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents and interprets findings derived from 368 valid questionnaire responses and eight Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted with NSDRC officials and disability cluster leaders. The analysis is structured around the three research questions guiding the study and integrates both quantitative data, presented in frequency and percentage tables, and qualitative evidence that provides contextual depth and narrative validation.

Research Question One: What is the level of awareness of NSDRC’s communication strategies among people with special needs in Nasarawa State?

Table 4.1: Awareness of NSDRC Communication Strategies

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Aware	143	38.9%
Not Aware	225	61.1%
Total	368	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Table 4.1 shows that only 38.9 per cent of respondents were aware of the NSDRC’s communication strategies, while 61.1 per cent were unaware. This low awareness level points to a major communication gap, reflecting insufficient visibility of the Commission’s activities among people with special needs (PWSN). The findings imply that the NSDRC’s information dissemination mechanisms may not be effectively engaging the intended beneficiaries, particularly at the grassroots level.

Qualitative insights from the KIIs reinforced this statistical finding. A cluster leader in Lafia explained:

“Most of our members do not even know that the Commission has information channels. Sometimes only a few leaders are invited to workshops, but information rarely reaches the grassroots.”

This remark reveals a pattern of limited, top-down information flow where only selected representatives are informed, leaving a vast majority of PWSN excluded. The finding aligns with Adedokun and Alabi (2019), who reported low awareness of disability commissions in Nigeria due to weak dissemination systems and limited community engagement. From a theoretical standpoint, this corroborates the Social Model of Disability, which attributes exclusion not to impairments but to inadequate institutional structures that fail to provide equal access to information (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 2018).

Research Question Two: How accessible are NSDRC’s communication strategies to people with special needs?

Table 4.2: Accessibility of Communication Channels

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Accessible	169	45.9%
Hardly Accessible	199	54.1%
Total	368	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

As indicated in Table 4.2, more than half of the respondents (54.1%) found the Commission’s communication strategies hardly accessible, while only 45.9% considered them accessible. These results suggest substantial accessibility barriers within the NSDRC’s outreach framework. Respondents cited lack of braille publications, absence of sign language interpretation, and minimal audio-described content as major hindrances to inclusive communication.

An NSDRC official in Keffi acknowledged these constraints, noting:

“We try to use radio and TV, but we have not been able to provide interpreters or braille materials. This is a funding issue, but we know it limits participation.”

This statement reveals institutional awareness of the problem but also underscores resource limitations and weak prioritisation of disability-sensitive adaptations. The findings echo those of Eze (2020) and Afolabi (2019), who observed that reliance on traditional mass media without inclusive features perpetuates exclusion among people with sensory disabilities. The results further affirm the Participatory Communication Theory, which emphasises co-creation of communication processes with affected stakeholders to ensure accessibility, ownership, and impact (Freire, 1970; Thomas, 2021).

Research Question Three: How effective are NSDRC’s communication strategies in enabling participation of PWSN in welfare programmes?

Table 4.3: Effectiveness of Communication Strategies in Enabling Participation

Response Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Effective	52	14.1%
Effective	91	24.7%
Neutral	101	27.4%
Ineffective	81	22.0%
Very Ineffective	43	11.8%
Total	368	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Findings in Table 4.3 show that only 38.8 per cent of respondents (those who rated communication as *Very Effective* or *Effective*) believed NSDRC’s communication strategies had successfully enabled participation in welfare programmes. By contrast, 33.8 per cent described them as *Ineffective* or *Very Ineffective*, while 27.4 per cent expressed neutrality likely reflecting uncertainty about communication impact or limited exposure to NSDRC initiatives.

A cluster leader in Akwanga observed:

“Even when the Commission communicates, the information does not always reach the grassroots, and many of us miss the chance to participate in programmes.”

This statement illustrates the fragmented nature of communication flow and the absence of mechanisms to ensure that information disseminated through centralised channels reaches local disability clusters. The findings resonate with Thomas (2021), who identifies the persistence of top-down communication in local governance as a key barrier to participation.

From a theoretical lens, this again validates the Social Model of Disability, which attributes participation gaps to institutional and communicative exclusion rather than individual limitations. The NSDRC’s inability to decentralise communication or