

# The influence of Communication in Promoting Transparency and Accountability in Public Administration: Empirical evidence learnt from Uganda in Horn of Africa

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**Abstract**—This study examined the role of communication in promoting transparency and accountability in public administration, with specific reference to Government in Uganda. Guided by Democratic Participant Theory and Public Sphere Theory, the study explored how communication enhances citizen participation, democracy, and good governance in local governments. A mixed methodology was adopted and it facilitated collection of qualitative data and a case research design was employed for in-depth understanding of the variable under investigation. The study used interviews, survey and, focus group discussions. The study collected data from 122 research representatives' who were scientifically selected across sub-counties and a town council in Uganda, Horn of Africa. Findings revealed that effective communication promotes transparency, accountability, and citizen participation by enabling citizens to monitor leaders and engage in decision-making processes. However, the district's communication system was constrained by delayed information dissemination, inadequate feedback mechanisms, limited outreach to rural communities, and low public awareness of communication tools. Radio and notice boards were the most commonly used channels, although their impact remained limited. The study further found gender disparities in access to information, with women facing greater challenges. The study concludes that ineffective communication undermines democratic governance and accountability in local governments. It recommends strengthening communication structures, improving timely information dissemination, and promoting two-way communication to enhance transparency and citizen engagement in the Horn of Africa.

**Index Terms**—Communication, Transparency, Accountability, Local Government, Citizen Participation

## I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is a fundamental pillar of effective public administration and democratic governance. In contemporary governance systems, citizens increasingly demand openness, responsiveness, and accountability from public institutions (Rothwell et al., 2024). Effective communication enables governments to share information, explain policies and decisions, and engage citizens in governance processes. In local governments particularly, communication serves as a bridge between leaders and citizens by fostering transparency, enhancing public trust, and promoting citizen participation in development programmes and decision-making processes (OECD, 2022). Without effective communication, public institutions risk weakening accountability mechanisms, reducing citizen confidence, and undermining democratic governance. Globally, transparency and accountability have become central principles in public sector governance reforms (Dursun-Özkanca, 2021). Governments and development partners have emphasized participatory governance approaches that encourage information sharing, public dialogue, and citizen involvement in monitoring public resources and service delivery. In developing countries, however, local governments continue to face challenges related to ineffective communication systems, limited citizen access to information, bureaucratic delays, and weak feedback

mechanisms (WEI, 2023). These challenges often hinder meaningful public participation and create opportunities for corruption, misuse of public resources, and low trust in government institutions.

In Uganda, decentralization was introduced to bring services closer to citizens and strengthen local participation in governance. Local governments are therefore expected to maintain open communication channels that facilitate information dissemination and citizen engagement (Mhatre, 2025). Despite the existence of communication frameworks and policies, many districts still experience inadequate communication between leaders and citizens, particularly at grassroots levels. In Iganga District Local Government, concerns persist regarding delayed dissemination of information, limited awareness of government programmes, inadequate public feedback systems, and low citizen participation in governance processes. These gaps raise questions about the effectiveness of communication in promoting transparency and accountability within the districts in Uganda (Rak, 2024).

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by examining the relationship between communication, transparency, and accountability in a local government context in Uganda, with specific focus on Uganda in the Horn of Africa (Harry et al., 2024). While previous studies have largely focused on governance reforms, corruption, and service delivery, limited attention has been given to how communication practices directly influence accountability and citizen participation at district level (Ndwakhulu & Icarbord, 2024). The study lies in its integration of communication practices with democratic governance outcomes, particularly within a decentralized local government setting. The study further provides empirical insights into grassroots communication challenges, gender disparities in access to information, and the effectiveness of commonly used communication channels such as radio and notice boards (Dursun-Özkanca, 2021). By linking communication structures to governance outcomes, the study offers a practical and contextualized understanding of how local governments can strengthen transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement in Uganda and similar developing-country contexts of Uganda, in the Horn of Africa.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design to examine the role of communication in promoting transparency and accountability in Local Government Uganda, in the Horn of Africa. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enabled an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions (Ali et al., 2024). The method provides suitable insights regarding communication practices, citizen participation, and governance processes within the local government context. The study further employed a survey design to collect data from a diverse range of respondents involved in local governance structures and community affairs (Hübner, 2024).

The study was conducted in Local Government, located in eastern Uganda, in the Horn of Africa. The district was purposively selected due to persistent concerns regarding information dissemination, citizen participation, and accountability mechanisms within local governance structures (Experts, 2023). The study focused on three sub-counties and one town council to capture both rural and urban perspectives on communication and governance practices.

Gilliat-Ray & Timol, (2021) contends that, a sample of 122 respondents was selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to identify key informants, including district officials, local council leaders, and administrative personnel, based on their knowledge and involvement in governance and communication processes (Abdul et al., 2025). Simple random sampling was employed to select ordinary citizens and community members to ensure broader representation and minimize selection bias.

Data were collected using multiple qualitative methods, including face-to-face interviews, questionnaires, focus group discussions, and observation (Buckler & Moore, 2023). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants to obtain detailed insights into communication systems, transparency practices, and accountability challenges within the district. Questionnaires were administered to community members to gather perceptions regarding access to information and citizen participation. Focus group discussions enabled participants to share collective experiences and views on governance and

communication practices, while observation was used to examine existing communication channels such as notice boards and public information systems (Fatai & Bryan, 2023)

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Responses from interviews, focus group discussions, and open-ended questionnaire items were transcribed, coded, and organized into themes aligned with the study objectives. Thematic analysis enabled the identification of recurring patterns related to communication effectiveness, transparency, accountability, citizen participation, and challenges affecting information dissemination in the district (Cao et al., 2024).

To ensure validity and reliability, triangulation of data collection methods was employed to compare findings from different sources and enhance the credibility of the results (Mandal et al., 2022). Ethical considerations were also observed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, participation was voluntary, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained to protect respondents' identities and responses.

### III. RESULTS

The findings of the study indicated how communication can enhance democracy and good governance in local governments of Uganda in the Horn of Africa. The respondents in general conquered that communication offers an opportunity in fostering democracy and good governance in local governments (Ahmad & Islam, 2024). Up to 98.4% of the respondents either strongly agreed, agreed or somewhat agreed, as compared to a minimal 1.6% that disagreed with the need for quality and timely information for promoting democracy and good governance in local governments (Table 1.1). All those (1.6%) who disagreed were males, while there were significant differences in choices across age and occupation groups. These findings were confirmed during the focus group discussions (FGDs) with the various respondents' categories.

Some respondents indicated that they perceived democracy to exist when leaders regularly inform the general public about developments and activities happening within the districts in Uganda (Ndwakhulu & Icarbord, 2024). Another respondent added that when leaders give out information about decisions or

policies made, it means that they are being answerable to their bosses, the voters and this promotes a cordial relationship in Uganda, Horn of Africa.

Table 1.1 Showing the respondents opinion on the need for information as a tool for promoting democracy and good governance in local governments

Response Category	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	76	62.3	62.3
Agree	32	26.2	88.5
Somewhat agree	12	9.8	98.4
Disagree	2	1.6	100.0
Total	122	100.0%	100.0%

(Source: Primary Data, 2026)

The importance of communication in empowering people to supervise their leaders was ranked first, followed by making leaders transparent and accountable, fighting corruption and allowing people to participate in decision making were ranked jointly third followed by the need for communication in making informed decisions on leadership (Table 1.2). Though they did not rank them, participants during focus group discussions echoed similar views. One participant said that communication empowers the common people to raise their concerns in case the leaders deviated from the original plans and policies (Baehler, 2023). Another one argued that communication bridges the gap between leaders and the led in such a way that the people come to realise the authority power that they have over the people they entrusted with power.

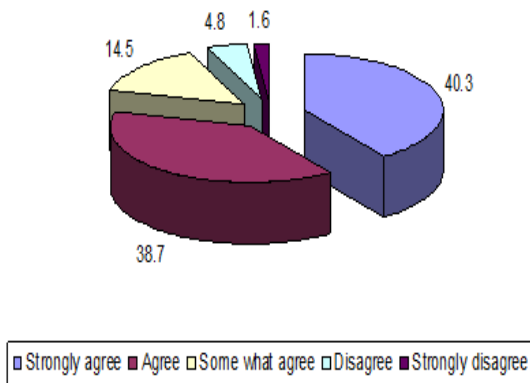
Table 1.2 Showing the respondents multiple ranking of importance of communication in promoting democracy and good governance

Communication benefits	Ranked choices	Percent
Empowers people to supervise their leaders	116	25.0%
Allows people to participate in decision making	100	21.6%
Fights corruption	90	19.4%
Makes leaders transparent and accountable	90	19.4%
Communication helps people to choose the best leaders	68	14.7%
Total	464	100.0%

(Source: Primary Data, 2026)

The findings indicated the importance of communication in promotion of transparency and good governance was emphasized, there was general agreement in the FGDs that the messages for communication should be easy. To understand to enable people to participate in decision-making processes (Ahluwalia, 2025). This finding was confirmed in the face-to-face interviews where most (40.3%) respondents strongly agreed, 38.7 % agreed, while only 1.6% disagreed (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1 Pie chart showing the respondents' opinions on need for messages for communication to be easy to understand to enable people to participate



(Source: Primary Data, 2026)

Relatedly, the respondents overwhelmingly (98.4%) seconded the need for access to information in possession of district officials to empower citizens to hold their leaders accountable (Bossu et al., 2021). During the FGDs, the respondents had decried the lack of such information, on which basis they would evaluate their leaders' performance.

Table 1.3 Showing views on the need for access to information in possession of district officials to empower citizens to hold their leaders accountable

Response Category	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	38	31.1	31.1
Agree	44	36.1	67.2
Somewhat agree	32	26.2	93.4
Disagree	6	4.9	98.4
Strongly disagree	2	1.6	100.0
Total	122	100.0%	100.0%

(Source: Primary Data, 2026) Communication Practices that are used to promote Transparency and Accountability in Uganda

This is the third research question that this research considered. The question established the existing communication practices that were being used to promote transparency and accountability in Iganga in Uganda (Pandeya & Oyama, 2024). From the distributed questionnaires, the most common method for promoting transparency and accountability in the district was radio talk shows (25.3%); displaying information on notice boards and public places (19.8%), while holding public meetings had the least rank (16.9%) (See Table 1.4).

However, the frequency of the radio-talk shows in this regard was found to be quite low. This information was revealed by a respondent during a face-to-face interview at the district headquarters (Ndwakhulu & Icarbord, 2024). "We planned to hold six radio-talk shows in the 2009/10 financial year but due to limited resources, only two were aired" (Interview 4, April 22 2010). Another respondent said that inadequate financial resources limited the number of budgeted radio-talk shows that had been planned for NAADS programs from 36 to just eight. Other departments that reported to have planned for radio programs but did not conduct them due to limited funds included Health, Forestry and Water.

Another respondent said that communication in the district mainly originated from the district headquarters down to the lower local councils and people at the grassroots rarely give them feedback. "We always give information in form of letters, announcements and pronouncements (Aras, 2025). with hope that people will take and act on them. Rarely do we, ask for their responses" (Interview 1, April 15 2010). In trying to reach the audiences, the district local government uses services of the Information Office, which is a key technical office in matters to do with communication. It is this office that is mandated to design a communication strategy that all officers in the district have to follow during implementation of the communication process. It was established that this plan was in place. However, majority of the respondents at the district headquarters expressed ignorance about this plan (Burnett, 2024). "I am not aware about it" (Interview 2, April 15 2010). "We have never discussed and approved such a plan in the

Technical Planning Committee (TPC)” (Interview 1, 3 and 6, April 15 2010).

Meanwhile, other officers expressed ignorance about the role of information sharing in the local government. Most of them said that communication meant them attending and addressing meetings or rallies and having their messages reported in the media (OECD, 2022). “Our Information Officer normally writes stories about our activities but I would be disappointed if I presided over a function and nothing came out especially on radio” (Interview 9, April 27 2010). The research, further established the existence of a client charter for the district. This is a document that the district leadership published indicating commitment to the people in the district about the planned programs/work plans and how they were to be executed. The Client Charter also includes the mission, vision and values of the district. One of the values in the Charter relates to ensuring of transparency and accountability in the delivery of services to the people.

However, this researcher discovered that most people including district staff did not know or were not bothered about the importance of this document as evidenced by one respondent at the district headquarters (Ndwakhulu & Icarbord, 2024). “Though it is in place, it is not widely known and heads of department do not pay attention to it even if they contributed to its making”. (Interview 2, April 15, 2010). Another respondent added that the Client Charter was a stand-alone from departmental plans that are made independent of the aspirations of the district as envisaged through the charter. In short, there was lack of integration of the district work plans in relation to the Charter.

Table 1.4 Showing the respondents multiple ranking of the communication methods used in Iganga district.

Communication methods	Ranked Choices	Percent
Using radio talk shows	120	25.3%
Displaying information	94	19.8%
Publishing district work plans	90	19.0%
Writing stories in news papers	90	19.0%
Holding public meetings	80	16.9%
Total	474	100.0%

(Source: Primary Data, 2026)

In the table below, most respondents (81.7%) agreed that they were accessing information about tenders, civic jobs and work plans on notice boards at the district and sub county headquarters and other public places in Iganga district (Table 1.5). Most of those in disagreement (55%) were females, as compared to males. The researcher established that there were notice boards at all the district and Sub County headquarters. It emerged that this was one of the requirements under the Local Government Management and Service Delivery (LGMSD) program where a local government can lose marks during the annual national assessment exercise conducted by the Ministry of Local Government to assess performance (Alassouli, 2021). Results from this exercise that is conducted at the end of each financial year are based on by the ministry, to determine the amount of funds a particular local government gets.

A respondent, responsible for dissemination of information, reported the existence of a computer and still photo camera to use in the gathering, storage and dissemination of information. A Panasonic video camera that the district bought in 2001 had broken down at the time of doing this interview on April 17 2010. The researcher learnt that this office is mainly concerned with publishing stories related to district leaders especially on radio since most radio stations reach all corners of the district.

Table 1.5 Showing the respondents’ views about access to information in Iganga district

Response Category	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	16	13.3	13.3
Agree	49	40.0	53.3
Somewhat agree	35	28.3	81.7
Disagree	18	15.0	96.7
Strongly disagree	4	3.3	100.0
Total	122	100.0	100.0%

(Source: Primary Data, 2026)

As presented in table 1.6 below, the study also sought views whether people in sub counties were always informed when government funds were released to their areas under NAADS and LGMSDP. Most (44%) of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (12%) for easy monitoring and supervision. Very few (4%) strongly agreed, agreed (15%) or somewhat agreed (25%) that they were accessing such information (Aras, 2025). Information from the district administration about NAADS, LGMSDP and other government programs, activities and events was mainly accessed through reading from notice boards in public places (26.7%), community meetings (25.0%), letters (21.7%), radios (11.7%), newspapers (13.3%) and through other (1.7%) means such as friends, family and community relationships. This study has also confirmed that in Iganga district there was lack of an effective and functional information feedback strategy for information crucial for promotion of transparency and accountability. The majority (55%) of the respondents disagreed that the people in sub counties always gave feedback on information from the district about planning meetings, NAADS, LGMSDP, SFG, water and sanitation, health and roads. However, of those who disagreed, there was no clear-cut gender choice, as 66.7% males disagreed compared to 33.3% females, but all (100%) of those who strongly disagreed were females. Most respondents (41%) were personally somewhat satisfied, 15% were strongly satisfied, and 22% satisfied with the information dissemination process by Iganga district administration, as compared to the minority 23% who were dissatisfied. Indeed the reasons for those who were strongly satisfied were; content of information and channels of communication (50% each), with complete disregard for timing and leadership openness (Ndwakhulu & Icarbord, 2024) .The satisfied group had mostly (63.6%) impressed by the channels of communication, content of information (27.3%) and leadership openness. Timing of information was only to the somewhat satisfied group, even then the least important (7.7%) as channel of communication (34.6%) superseded content of information and leadership openness (15.4% each).

Table 1.6: Respondents' perceptions of information access, feedback, and satisfaction with information dissemination in Iganga district

Indicator	Response Category	Percentage (%)
Awareness of Government Funds Released under NAADS and LGMSDP	Strongly Disagreed	12.0
	Disagreed	44.0
	Somewhat Agreed	25.0
	Agreed	15.0
	Strongly Agreed	4.0
Sources of Information on Government Programs and Activities	Notice Boards	26.7
	Community Meetings	25.0
	Letters	21.7
	Newspapers	13.3
	Radio	11.7
	Other Sources	1.7
Community Feedback on District Information	Disagreed that people provided feedback	55.0
	Agreed that people provided feedback	45.0
Gender Distribution among Respondents who Disagreed about Community Feedback	Male	66.7
	Female	33.3
Overall Satisfaction with Information Dissemination Process	Strongly Satisfied	15.0
	Satisfied	22.0
	Somewhat Satisfied	41.0
	Dissatisfied	23.0
Reasons for Strong Satisfaction	Content of Information	50.0
	Channels of Communication	50.0
Reasons for Satisfaction	Channels of Communication	63.6

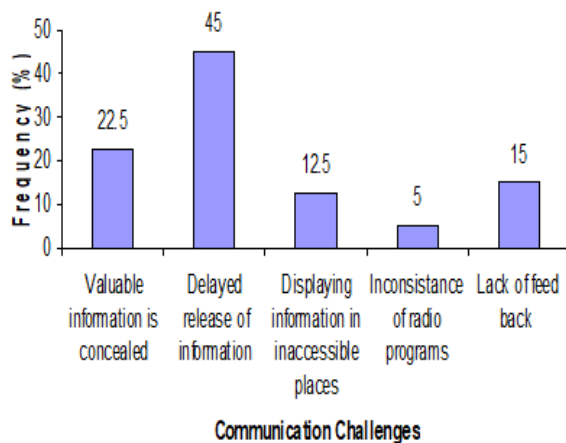
Indicator	Response Category	Percentage (%)
	Content of Information	27.3
	Leadership Openness	9.1
Reasons for Somewhat Satisfaction	Channels of Communication	34.6
	Content of Information	15.4
	Leadership Openness	15.4
	Timing of Information	7.7

(Source: Primary Data, 2026)

### Challenges being faced in the promotion of Transparency and Accountability through Communication

Under this section the researcher sought to find out the challenges being faced in the promotion of transparency and accountability through communication in Iganga district. Figure 1.2 shows the commonest challenges in the promotion of transparency and accountability through communication in Iganga district. These were, delayed release of information, concealment of valuable information and lack of feedback are where the prominent challenges recorded in the study.

Figure 1.2 Bar graph showing the challenges in the promotion of transparency and accountability through communication in Iganga district, Uganda.



(Source: Primary Data, 2026)

The findings indicate that the delayed release of information was the most significant challenge, cited by 45% of respondents. This suggests that information related to government programs, activities, and services often reaches communities too late to enable effective participation, monitoring, or decision-making. Delays in information dissemination can undermine transparency and reduce citizens' ability to engage meaningfully in local governance processes. The second most frequently reported challenge was that valuable information is concealed, mentioned by 22.5% of respondents. This finding points to perceptions of limited openness and transparency within the district administration, which may contribute to mistrust among community members and hinder accountability efforts.

A further 15% of respondents identified lack of feedback mechanisms as a major challenge. This suggests that while information may sometimes be disseminated to communities, there are insufficient opportunities for citizens to provide feedback, ask questions, or receive responses from district authorities. The absence of effective feedback channels can weaken citizen participation and reduce the responsiveness of local government institutions. Additionally, 12.5% of respondents reported that information was often displayed in inaccessible places, making it difficult for many community members to access important announcements and public notices. This highlights the need for more inclusive and community-friendly information dissemination approaches that consider literacy levels, geographic accessibility, and communication preferences. The least cited challenge was the inconsistency of radio programs, reported by only 5% of respondents. Although radio remains an important source of information in rural areas, the findings suggest that respondents viewed other barriers, such as delays and limited transparency, as more critical obstacles to accessing government information. The findings indicate the challenges are curtailing the progress in information dissemination concerning the priority programs or activities for the promotion of transparency and accountability (Ejikonye, 2024).

Table 1.7: Respondents' Perceptions of Priority Information Dissemination Activities, Satisfaction Levels, and Reasons for Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

Indicator	Response Category	Percentage (%)
Priority Activities that the District Should Communicate to the Public	NAADS and Other Government Programmes	50.0
	Tenders	37.9
	Civil Service Jobs	10.4
	Campaigns and Elections	1.7
Satisfaction with Information Dissemination on Priority Activities	Satisfied	71.7
	Dissatisfied	23.3
	No Response/Undecided	5.0
Reasons for Satisfaction with Information Dissemination	Quality of Media Channels Used	42.2
	Timing of Information	24.4
	Openness of Leaders	13.3
	Other Reasons	20.1
	Reasons for Dissatisfaction with Information Dissemination	Difficult to Know When Tenders are Advertised
	Language Barrier	22.2
	Other Reasons	38.9

(Source: Primary Data, 2026)

The priority activities that were reported for the district to communicate to the populace were government programs like NAADs (50.0%), tenders (37.9%), civil service jobs and campaigns and

elections (1.7%). Paradoxically, despite those challenges, the majority (71.7%) of the respondents were satisfied with the way information about the priority activities, with a sizeable proportion being dissatisfied (23.3%). The main reasons advanced for the satisfaction were the quality of media channels used (42.2%), timing of information (24.4%) and openness by the leaders (13.3%). However, among dissatisfied respondents, the major concerns were the difficulty to know when tenders are advertised (38.9%) and language barrier (22.2%) were the highest ranked challenges causing dissatisfaction.

During face to face interviews, district leaders cited inadequate resources that included lack of funds for communication budgets, lack of communication equipment like cameras, TV sets, generator, transport and personnel (Goodrich, 2022). “The Information office is manned by one full-time staff and a volunteer who works as an assistant, while funding to the department is almost non-existent. Therefore, there is little that can be done to give people information they require” reported one respondent.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Communication is an indispensable catalyst for transparency, accountability, democracy, and good governance in local government administration. This study has shown that when communication is effective, open, and participatory, it strengthens the relationship between leaders and citizens, enhances public trust, and promotes meaningful citizen engagement in decision-making processes. Leaders and civil servants, as trustees of public office, are obligated to ensure that their decisions, actions, and development programmes are communicated transparently and in a timely manner to the people they serve. In this regard, governance becomes more democratic when citizens are actively informed, consulted, and their views are incorporated into public decision-making.

However, the situation in Local Government reveals persistent gaps in communication practices that continue to undermine transparency and accountability. Despite the existence of communication structures, challenges such as delayed dissemination of information, limited outreach to rural communities, inadequate feedback mechanisms, and low public awareness of communication tools

significantly reduce the effectiveness of governance processes. In addition, selective sharing of information, particularly in sensitive areas such as tendering and recruitment, creates perceptions of secrecy, which weakens public trust and opens space for corruption, nepotism, and favouritism.

The study further highlights inequalities in access to information, with women and rural populations facing greater barriers compared to other groups. This limits inclusiveness in governance and weakens the principle of equal participation in public affairs. Such weaknesses contradict the expectations of Article 176 of the Constitution of Uganda and the provisions of the Local Government Act (1997, as amended), which place a strong responsibility on local governments to ensure participatory service delivery and development management.

Overall, the study concludes that although communication is widely recognized as central to good governance, its effectiveness in Iganga District remains constrained by structural and operational weaknesses. These deficiencies hinder the realization of transparency, accountability, and democratic participation at the local level. Strengthening two-way communication systems, ensuring timely and accessible information dissemination, improving feedback mechanisms, and promoting inclusive engagement are therefore essential. A more open and participatory communication environment will foster mutual understanding between leaders and citizens, reduce suspicion, and enhance trust, accountability, and collective ownership of development programmes within Iganga District Local Government.

## V. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen communication for transparency and accountability in Local Government of Uganda in the Horn of Africa.

First, the district should strengthen its communication structures by institutionalizing a well-coordinated communication strategy that ensures timely, consistent, and accessible dissemination of public information. This includes improving the functionality of existing tools such as notice boards, public meetings, and official communication channels to ensure that information reaches all levels of the community in a timely manner.

Second, there is a need to enhance two-way communication mechanisms between leaders and citizens of Uganda in the Horn of Africa. The district should establish structured feedback systems such as community barazas, suggestion platforms, and regular dialogue forums where citizens can freely express concerns and receive responses from leaders. This will promote mutual understanding, trust, and accountability in governance processes in Uganda.

Third, the district should improve access to information at the grassroots level by decentralizing communication efforts. Particular attention should be given to rural communities and marginalized groups, especially women, who were found to face greater barriers in accessing information. Communication materials should be simplified, translated into local languages where necessary, and disseminated through accessible channels such as radio talk shows and community meetings.

Fourth, the use of radio as a communication channel should be strengthened and made more consistent. The district should collaborate with local radio stations to schedule regular programmes that provide updates on government projects, budgets, and service delivery outcomes. This will ensure wider reach and improved public awareness of government activities.

Fifth, transparency in sensitive governance processes such as tendering and recruitment should be enhanced. The district should ensure that all procedures are openly communicated, publicly displayed, and strictly adhere to legal frameworks to reduce perceptions of secrecy, corruption, nepotism, and favouritism.

Lastly, capacity building for both communication officers and local leaders should be prioritized. Training in public communication, participatory governance, and information management will improve their ability to effectively engage with citizens and manage communication systems. Strengthening human resource capacity will contribute significantly to improving transparency, accountability, and democratic governance in the Horn of Africa.

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