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(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

FROM BENIN'S *ALAFIA* 2025 VISION TO ITS 2060 VISION: COMMUNICATION ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

With less than two years remaining before the end of the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision, and following the announcement that Vision 2060 was to be formulated, there was broad agreement that the objectives of the earlier vision would not be met, and that weak communication had marked its implementation. This raises the question of whether the transition to Vision 2060 can succeed, and whether the expectations attached to it can be fulfilled, if communication is not given due consideration. The aim of this study is to examine the communication issues and challenges raised by the transition from the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision to Vision 2060. Grounded in the communication-for-development approach, it combines quantitative and qualitative methods to process and analyse data collected from the Beninese population. The findings show that 72% of respondents had no knowledge of the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision. Almost two-thirds (63%) described communication about the Vision as non-existent, and a further 34% considered it unsatisfactory. By contrast, 53% of respondents were aware of Vision 2060, which is still being formulated. Almost all respondents called for participatory communication before, during and after the implementation of Vision 2060.

Keywords: Communication Participatory, Vision, Issues, Challenges, Bénin

1 INTRODUCTION

Since 1960, Benin has implemented a succession of development projects and programmes. In July 1989, the introduction of the first structural adjustment programme led to the suspension of the Third Development Plan of the revolutionary period, which was then under way. This preceded the Maastricht Conference of July 1990, widely regarded as a turning point in the management of development in African countries (NLTPS-Benin 2025, 2000, p. 1).

In June 1999, the National Long-Term Perspective Studies (NLTPS), conducted in sixteen (16) African countries, produced an ambitious outcome for Benin: the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision, to be implemented over twenty-five years from 2000. Its guiding scenario was expressed as follows: "A flagship country, well-governed, united and at peace, with a

prosperous and competitive economy, cultural influence and social well-being." To achieve it, eight (8) strategies were formulated, supported by thirty-two (32) options, which were in turn broken down into one hundred and ninety-one (191) lines of action.

Initiatives of this kind, generally described as major projects because of their duration and complexity, require substantial resources and involve a large and highly diverse range of stakeholders (V. Lehmann, 2013, p. 5). They are also exposed to considerable external pressure, a feature common to all major public projects, whatever their nature (Cathérin, 2000, p. 5). This is consistent with the fact that many citizens take an interest in such initiatives, for a wide variety of reasons. How, then, are such major projects managed?

The question is all the more pressing in the current context, which is shaped by new considerations of many kinds, all oriented towards sustainable development. Like many other countries in Africa and elsewhere, Benin is pursuing major projects, among them the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision.

This vast 25-year project was launched in 2000 on the basis of the document produced by the National Long-Term Perspective Studies, entitled "Benin 2025: Alafia" (Long-Term Development Strategies for Benin), prepared with the technical and financial support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In November 2023, with less than two years to go before its end date, we felt it necessary to assess how, and to what extent, its management had taken account of internationally recognised principles of communication.

In practice, international organisations and agencies, as well as other institutions operating in Benin, place a communication strategy at the heart of their development initiatives. However, "it has been observed that, in some organisations, communication is not institutionalised, while in others it is not properly mastered" (O. C. Bérépa, 2017, p. 48).

As a process that coordinates all actions towards defined communication objectives, a communication strategy provides an overall view of the actions to be undertaken, makes it possible to measure their effectiveness and helps to optimise the communication budget. It is not a media plan presented as a strategy, as is sometimes the case in practice, nor can it bypass the demanding methodological steps involved in its design, in particular the identification of target groups before the selection of media, channels and tools. Planning and implementing communication requires considerable time, financial and human resources, and sustained, varied, multimedia activity.

Beyond its common association with the press and public relations activities of a company or institution, communication takes on an entirely different meaning in the context of development. "Communication for development is the use of communication processes, techniques and media to help people become aware of their situation and of the options available to them for change; to resolve social conflict and work towards consensus; to help people plan action for change and sustainable development; to help populations acquire the knowledge and skills they need to improve their own condition and that of their community; and to improve the effectiveness of public institutions.

Communication activities must be planned within a comprehensive strategy that includes research and the definition of objectives in terms of identifying audiences, designing appropriate messages, selecting dissemination channels, monitoring and feedback.

Multimedia approaches, which combine different communication channels so that they reinforce one another, produce the best results" (FAO, 2002, pp. ix–x).

Communication is therefore an indispensable component of any development process, which in turn stems from a vision that may be understood as "… a representation of the desired future, both rational and intuitive, comprehensive and forward-looking" (Caron and Martel, 2005, p. 12). Communication cannot be reduced to a project-management tool used essentially for risk management. When it is, it is rarely seen as a driving force of the project, and its direct contribution to the project's success is overlooked (V. Lehmann, 2013, p. 5).

When the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision was launched in 2000, it was therefore evident that such a major, high-stakes development project should be built around a communication strategy capable of delivering the expected results, and thus development (O. Bérépa, 2017, p. 51). Yet, less than two years before its end date, the record of twenty (20) years of implementation remains mixed, according to A. Dossou, a statistician-economist and former Minister in charge of public policy evaluation. He made this statement officially at a government-sponsored review ceremony held at the Palais des Congrès in Cotonou on 23 November 2023.

Among the shortcomings identified were weak communication about the Vision and inadequate promotion of it. As a key actor in the implementation of this long-term vision, he concluded that the structural transformation of the Beninese economy has yet to materialise.

This observation raises questions about the communication strategy developed for the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision. That communication took place during the Vision's activities is not in doubt; however, the approach on which it was based, its content, its implementation and, above all, its monitoring and evaluation are open to question.

Meanwhile, a new vision for 2060 has been announced. The government launched the process of formulating it on 23 November 2023 at the Palais des Congrès in Cotonou, in the presence of the nation's key stakeholders. Two main reasons were given: the pursuit of more effective public policies and the strengthening of national foresight capacity, so that the country can respond better to the profound changes taking place in the world.

An implicit transition is thus under way, from a vision that is drawing to a close to one that is still being built, with a view to correcting the shortcomings observed in past action. The communication weaknesses that characterised the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision clearly need to be remedied. This raises several questions and points to significant challenges. The central question is: how should the communication issues and challenges of the transition from the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision to Vision 2060 be assessed?

This question examines the communication methods and techniques used to promote the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision and whether or not they were effective, while also looking ahead to effective communication for the promotion of Vision 2060.

The objective of this research is therefore to examine the communication issues and challenges raised by the transition from the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision to Vision 2060. This is achieved by taking stock of the communication methods and techniques used to promote the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision, assessing their effectiveness, and (re)considering communication as an essential pillar of the promotion of Vision 2060.

The research is based on the premise that communication did not occupy a prominent place in the implementation of the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision.

2 MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1 Theoretical Framework

In the history of communication-for-development theory, modernisation theory comes first and remains relevant as an analytical framework for this study. It represents the foundation, indeed the very origin, of communication for development in the 1960s and 1970s. As thinking has evolved, however, new approaches have emerged that deserve to be considered when choosing a scientific framework of analysis.

Three major approaches to communication for development are now recognised, grouped into two largely opposing currents: the "dominant" and the "alternative" (S. R. Melkote, 2000, p. 42). The dominant current, represented by modernisation theory, rests on a single approach based on diffusion or persuasion, which seeks to change not only behaviours but also structural and institutional factors.

The alternative current encompasses both the critical approach and the participatory approach. The former, also known as the inequality or collective-resistance approach, seeks to combat structural inequalities and gives priority to structural and institutional change at the macro and supranational levels (M. Velmuradova, 2016, p. 4). The latter rejects top-down communication in favour of bottom-up communication (H. Ba, 2015, p. 13). It fosters individual and structural change initiated from within, based on the participation of beneficiaries in defining project objectives and the mechanisms of their own progress.

On closer examination, the main point of divergence between the diffusionist and participatory approaches lies in user participation. The former treats participation as a means, whereas the latter regards it as an end in itself (S. A. White, 1994, p. 18; S. R. Melkote, 2000, p. 42). The expertise of an external specialist, who analyses audiences, conducts research and sets project objectives and mechanisms, is thus contrasted with the participation of users in determining those objectives and mechanisms.

Whether beneficiary participation is regarded as a means or as an end, this study takes the position that the two approaches should complement each other in order to achieve better results. This position is in line with several researchers who advocate the complementarity and integration of both approaches in a so-called "convergent" model. This premise makes it possible to identify societal needs through the active participation of populations or experts, taking into account concrete situations, the potential of social demand and the wider context (J. Servaes, 2008, p. 171).

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection Techniques

This research adopts an exploratory mixed-methods design. It begins with a qualitative phase based on direct observation, documentary research and semi-structured interviews. Once the data from these techniques had been collected and analysed, a quantitative phase was carried out by means of a questionnaire.

Direct observation was conducted throughout the research in order to better understand the logics and representations of stakeholders regarding the communication deployed to promote the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision and Vision 2060, which is currently being formulated. Documentary research was used to gather relevant material on the subject, contributing to the literature review, the clarification of key concepts and the understanding of theories on perceptions and representations of communication for development. It also guided the search for published findings on the importance of communication in achieving the objectives of a development vision. Semi-structured interviews, in the form of open, focused and targeted conversations between the researcher and informants, were considered the most appropriate method for this study. They made it possible to analyse the communication practices and strategies deployed, to assess the public's level of knowledge of the two visions and to formulate recommendations for appropriate and, above all, participatory communication. The quantitative phase consisted essentially of a field survey using a questionnaire administered to a sample of individuals selected for this purpose.

3.2 Sampling Technique

Information about a population can be collected either exhaustively, through a census, or through sampling, which involves examining only a fraction of a broader parent population.

3.2.1 Parent Population

The population of Benin, estimated at 10,008,749 inhabitants, is the main target of this study (INSAE, 2015, p. 3). Given the national scope of Vision 2025, however, a representative selection was considered appropriate. An analysis of the distribution of the Beninese population led to the selection of the commune of Abomey-Calavi and the municipality of Cotonou as a reduced, representative model of Benin: two major communes in which all the ethnic groups identified at national level are present. The reasons for this choice are set out below.

Cotonou was chosen because it is the economic capital of Benin and attracts a wide range of social groups in search of more remunerative activities. As the country's largest business centre, it brings together a strong representation of the social groups that make up the national population. Several neighbourhoods in Cotonou's thirteen arrondissements illustrate this. The Akpakpa area as a whole, in the south-east, is home to people from the Ouémé and Plateau departments, while Hwlacodji and the surrounding areas as far as Guincomè are home to people from the Mono department (INSAE, 2015, p. 7).

The commune of Abomey-Calavi was chosen because of its strategic location, particularly its proximity to Cotonou, which has made it a dormitory town where workers return to rest after long and demanding working days. It is regarded as Benin in miniature (INSAE, 2015, p. 7).

3.2.2 Sample

The sample was constructed using the non-probability quota method. This technique is suited to surveys based on a representative sample when no sampling frame is available but the population under study is known. It relies on the researcher's judgement in selecting the components of the sample according to relevant criteria (quota or control variables) justified by the study situation or the case under investigation (H. Gumuchian and C. Marois, 2000, p. 69). Widely used in opinion surveys, it is also known as purposive or judgement sampling and allows a maximum of three (3) quota variables.

The final sample comprises one hundred and fifty (150) adult Beninese citizens divided into two generations. The first generation consists of people who had reached the age of majority by 1998, the reference year marking the preparatory phase of the *Benin 2025 Alafia Vision* document. The second consists of people who were born before 1998 but had not yet reached the age of majority at that time, together with those born between 1998 and 2006, who had all come of age by 2024, the penultimate year of the Vision and the year in which this study was conducted.

The three quota variables selected are therefore age, period of birth and area of residence.

4 RESULTS

The results are presented first and then analysed, before being discussed.

4.1 Presentation of Results

The information collected concerns knowledge of the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision and Vision 2060, as well as the communication methods and techniques needed to promote them and to win the support of the Beninese population. The data are both qualitative and quantitative.

4.1.1 Interview Results

Interviews were conducted with three key informants. Two of them had taken part in the preparation and development of the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision; the third is a member of the Vision 2060 steering team.

The main findings from these interviews are presented below, with verbatim excerpts.

Table 1: List of Interviewees

Identity	Qualification	Position
X	Economist	Member of the Technical Steering Unit for the National Long-Term Perspective Studies (*Cellule Technique de Pilotage des Études Nationales de Perspectives à Long Terme, CTP-NLTPS*) for the *Benin 2025 Alafia Vision*.
Y	Economist and planner	Participant in the national validation seminar-workshop on Phase 4 of the formulation of the *Benin 2025 Alafia Vision*.
Z	Economist	Senior official at the Ministry of Planning and Coordination of Government Action; member of the steering team for *Vision 2060*.

Source: Authors' field survey, 2024.

All the interviewees pointed to a major shortcoming in the communication surrounding the *Benin 2025 Alafia Vision*.

4.1.2 Place Given to Communication

According to X:

"… Promoting participation necessarily involves a communication dimension, so that people know what you are doing and what you expect of them, and so that you can discuss things with them. The communication component, strictly speaking, was never established as such.

Each sector ministry has its own communication unit, responsible for communicating on its activities: promoting them, making them known and developing them. This has long been the case. Since 2001, under Kérékou I and II, through Boni Yayi's ten years in office, and now under Talon, who is serving a second term, does the Ministry of Planning have a communication unit? Does it have even one communication officer? What does it do to promote the Ministry's projects, including the Vision, through communication? It was the Ministry of Planning that coordinated and steered the Vision, and it is authorised to have it implemented by all stakeholders.

The project document is available on government websites, but it is sometimes incomplete.

There was no communication plan during the preparation phase of the Vision, and even less so during the phase in which it was supposed to be implemented."

(Interview conducted on 17 January 2024)

When interviewed on 8 February 2024, Y described the shortcomings that characterised communication on the *Benin 2025 Alafia* Vision. At the operational level, "… no strategy was formulated, adapted or validated… There were no communication specialists." *(Interview conducted on 8 February 2024)*

Z offers the following view:

"The Alafia Vision is unknown; some citizens see it merely as a slogan, and it has never been popularised. Admittedly, it is a 25-year development compass adopted in 2000 and a remarkable piece of thinking, but it is little known and has been left in a drawer. There has been a lack of communication about it."

(Interview conducted on 11 June 2024)

4.1.3 Communication Issues

As a member of the Technical Steering Unit for the National Long-Term Perspective Studies (CTP-NLTPS) for the *Benin 2025 Alafia Vision*, X also considered whether there were communication issues at stake, and stated:

"A communication plan was needed to make the Vision known and to secure stakeholders' support for its implementation, monitoring and evaluation, so that it would become everyone's concern." The Director General of Development Policies (DGPD) sums up these communication issues as "understanding, inclusion and buy-in…"

(Interview conducted on 17 January 2024)

Asked about the approach adopted during the development phase of the *Benin 2025 Alafia Vision*, X, a member of the Technical Steering Unit for the National Long-Term Perspective Studies (CTP-NLTPS) for the *Benin 2025 Alafia Vision*, described it as follows :

"It was participatory, and 'there were communication practices to prepare people's information with a view to securing their support for the process. What did we want from people, and how could we obtain it from them? That was essentially our communication practice.' It was in this context that, during the preparatory phase of Vision 2025, the communication channels used at the time were referred to as communication vectors.

Short scenes were written to convey messages, poems were commissioned for recitation on various occasions, and songs were planned in French and, above all, in national languages (at least three were selected: Fon, Yoruba and Dendi). There was also theatre, which we entrusted to the actors we approached, the late Cossi and Bio. Their proposal was not given enough thought, and it ultimately proved ineffective. Its purpose was to clarify the message and avoid confusion between the project's acronym and the name of a political party that some people believed had just been created.

In addition, in 1999, a competition was launched for a press article on Benin's development from a forward-looking perspective, but the entries received were not particularly relevant. Three articles were eventually selected, and the most elaborate was awarded a prize and published in two newspapers, La Nation and one other."

Three local languages were selected during the NLTPS development phase: Fon, Yoruba and Dendi. (Interview conducted on 17 January 2024)

4.1.4 Assessment of Communication Actions

X, Y and Z stated:

"… For lack of expertise, the choices made were the result of the absence of communication specialists within the steering unit. No concrete impact had been achieved by 2024."

(Interviews conducted on 17 January, 8 February and 11 June 2024)

This is the overall assessment of the three key informants, all specialists in planning and foresight, who also made recommendations for Benin's development Vision 2060.

4.1.5 Recommendations for Better Communication on Vision 2060

According to X:

"… the concept note should already include a dedicated section on the communication plan or strategy to be implemented. Alongside communication, a rigorous methodology is essential and counts for a great deal."

(Interview conducted on 17 January 2024)

According to Y :

"The need for a communication strategy covering the periods before, during and after Benin's new development vision no longer needs to be demonstrated."

(Interview conducted on 8 February 2024)

With regard to Benin's Vision 2060, which aims to build a well-governed, highly developed, fulfilled and prosperous nation, Z stated that the Ministry of Planning and Coordination of Government Action is committed to maintaining continuous communication throughout the process, from the formulation of the Vision to the period after its implementation. He described the Vision as "*a long-term development contract for all Beninese people*

A communication agency has been recruited by the Government to develop a comprehensive communication strategy. It is working with the government's communication focal points, and once completed, the strategy will be submitted to the Executive for approval. The communication activities carried out since the beginning of the formulation process have followed the communication plan for the formulation phase and have included:

producing and broadcasting awareness-raising spots on radio and television;

- media debates;
- billboard and poster campaigns;
- public events (including the official launch of the formulation process and preparations for field missions);
- "Palaver Tree" discussion programmes;
- distribution of brochures and leaflets.

The communication plan for the implementation phase is currently being drawn up, and a further plan will be designed and validated for the post-implementation phase. In today's information age, securing public support requires the use of every appropriate communication channel to mobilise all Beninese citizens around this national development project.

The implementation phase is supported by a concept note that provides for continuous communication. This covers all channels, including community radio stations, digital platforms (particularly to reach Beninese citizens living abroad) and community-based communication. Communication activities are planned before, during and after the field collection of citizens' aspirations: a first campaign will announce the deployment of the data-collection teams, a second will accompany the fieldwork, and a third will follow the completion of the survey.

Even the report-writing stage will be supported by communication activities, including training for technical outreach staff, competitions for web activists, the production of short sketches and, above all, the use of local languages, as was already the case for the launch spots. Interviews during the data-collection phase will also be conducted in local languages.

A major challenge, however, concerns the translation and dissemination of written documents in local languages. Although these documents will be translated once the French version has been validated, the population's low literacy rate means that many citizens will be unable to read these tools for their own development. To address this, audio materials in local languages may be produced on the key aspects of Benin's Vision 2060.

The importance attached to communication is clearly reflected in the budget allocated to it, a significant share of which has already been spent on completed and ongoing communication activities.

The name of the Vision will be chosen by consensus with all Beninese citizens. It should be simple, memorable and symbolic: a genuine national brand, an ideal to uphold, a value to instil and an image of the kind of citizen the country hopes to foster. As the interviewee put it, "everything begins in people's minds." The Vision must therefore gain enough legitimacy to become firmly anchored in the collective memory of the nation, from adults to the very young, so that it enjoys broad and lasting public ownership that no politician can take away. This is precisely where communication has a central role to play: before the process, to rally citizens around the Vision; during the process, to encourage participation; and afterwards, to foster widespread ownership through spots, visual materials, school textbooks and other educational resources.

(Interview conducted on 11 June 2024)

The interviews on the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision and Vision 2060 thus reveal two contrasting approaches: the former was characterised by limited communication, whereas the latter adopts continuous communication at every stage of the development process.

In addition to the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews based on an interview guide, quantitative data were gathered by administering a structured questionnaire to the target population during a field survey.

4.2 Results of the Quantitative Survey

4.2.1 Distribution of the Sample by Awareness of the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision

The figure below shows the distribution of respondents according to their awareness of the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision.

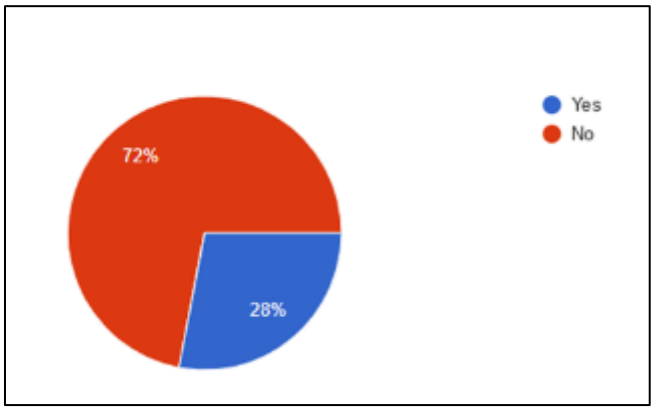


Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents by Awareness of the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision

Source: Authors' field survey, 2024.

Only 28% of respondents were aware of the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision, while 72% knew nothing at all about it.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by the Communication Channel Through Which They Learned About the *Benin 2025 Alafia Vision*

Communication channels		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single channels	Television	8	5.33%
	Radio	9	6%
	Billboards/posters	0	0%
	Print newspapers	0	0%
	Word of mouth	9	6%
	Website	2	1.33%
	Online press	1	0.66%
	Facebook	0	0%
	Caravan	0	0%
	WhatsApp	0	0%
	Town crier	0	0%
	None	108	72%
	In class	4	2.66%
	Seminar	1	0.66%
	Not aware	1	0.66%

Combined channels	Caravan and radio	1	0.66%
	Television, radio and word of mouth	1	0.66%
	Radio and print newspapers	1	0.66%
	Television and word of mouth	1	0.66%
	Discussion with an official	1	0.66%
	Report	2	1.33%
Total		150	100%

Source: Authors' field survey, 2024.

The high proportion of respondents who were unaware of the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision (72%) reflects the lack of any communication channel through which they could have learned about it. Among the 28% who were aware of it, the information reached them mainly through radio, word of mouth, television and the classroom.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Preferred Communication Channel for Updates on the *Benin 2025 Alafia Vision*

Communication channels		**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Single channels	Television	4	2.7%
	Radio	7	4.7%
	Website	10	6.7%
	Online press	3	2%
	Facebook	8	5.3%
	WhatsApp	17	11.3%
	None	66	44%
Combined channels	All channels	13	8.7%
	Other	22	14.6%
Total		150	100%

Source: Authors' field survey, 2024.

The table above shows respondents' preferred communication channels for receiving updates on the Vision. Both traditional and digital channels are favoured.

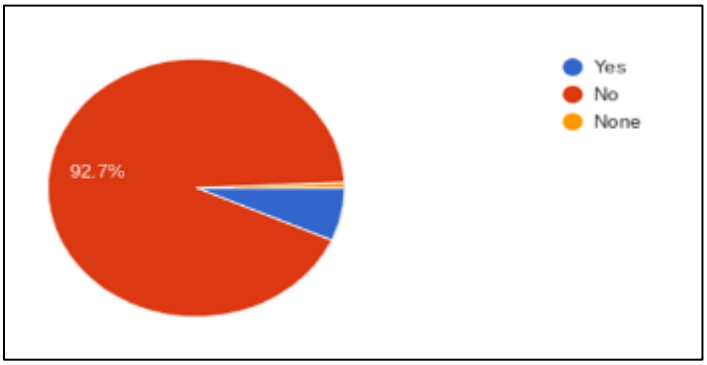


Figure 2: Participation in Alafia Vision Events or Initiatives

Source: Authors' field survey, 2024.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (93%) stated that they had not taken part in any event or initiative promoting the *Benin 2025 Alafia Vision*.

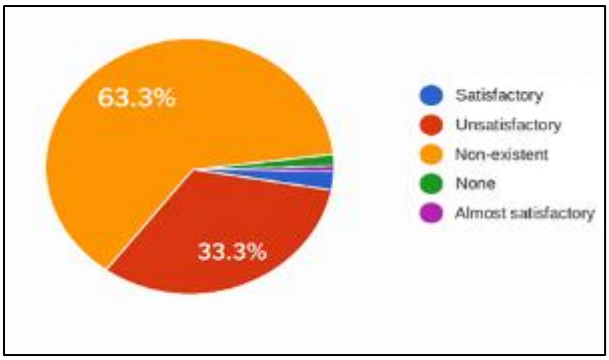


Figure 3: Effectiveness of Communication on the Alafia Vision

Source: Authors' field survey, 2024.

When asked to assess communication on the Vision, 63.3% of respondents described it as non-existent and about 34% as unsatisfactory.

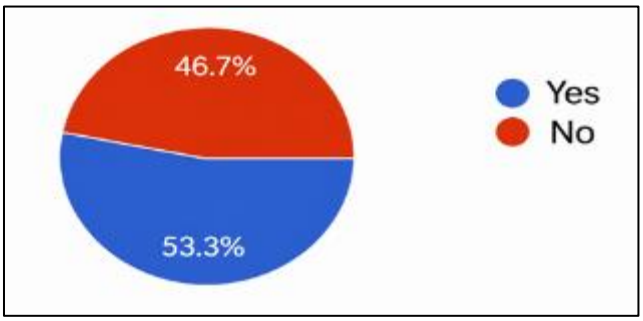


Figure 4: Distribution of Respondents by Awareness of *Vision 2060*

Source: Authors' field survey, 2024.

As for Vision 2060, which is currently being formulated, 53% of respondents were aware of the project, that is, more than half of those surveyed.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by the Communication Channel Through Which They Learned About Vision 2060

Communication channels		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single channels	Television	29	19%
	Radio	3	2%
	Website	5	3.33%
	Print newspapers	2	1.33%
	Facebook	9	6%
	WhatsApp	6	4%
	Workshop	3	2%
	Report	6	4%
	Word of mouth	9	6%
	None	70	47%
Combined channels	Social media	5	3.33%

	Other	3	2%
Total		150	100%

Source: Authors' field survey, 2024.

The population learned about Vision 2060 through a variety of traditional and digital channels. Television was the main source of information (19%), followed by word of mouth (6%), Facebook (6%), reports (4%), websites (3.33%) and social media as a whole (3.33%).

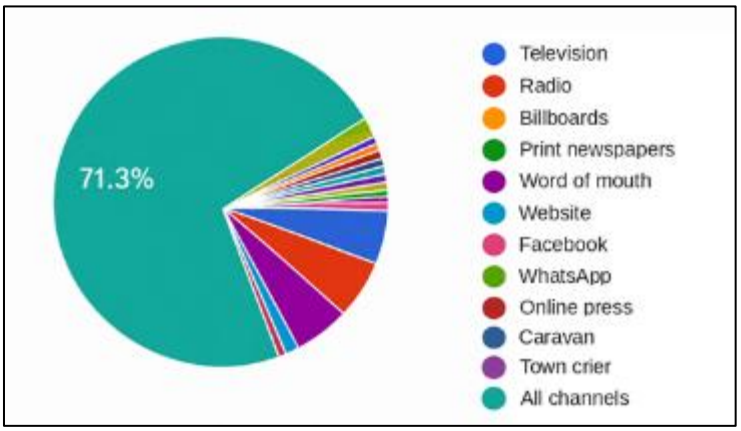


Figure 5: Preferred Channels for Formulating Vision 2060

Source: Authors' field survey, 2024.

Most citizens would like all communication channels to be used in formulating Vision 2060, as shown by the 71% of respondents who chose this option.

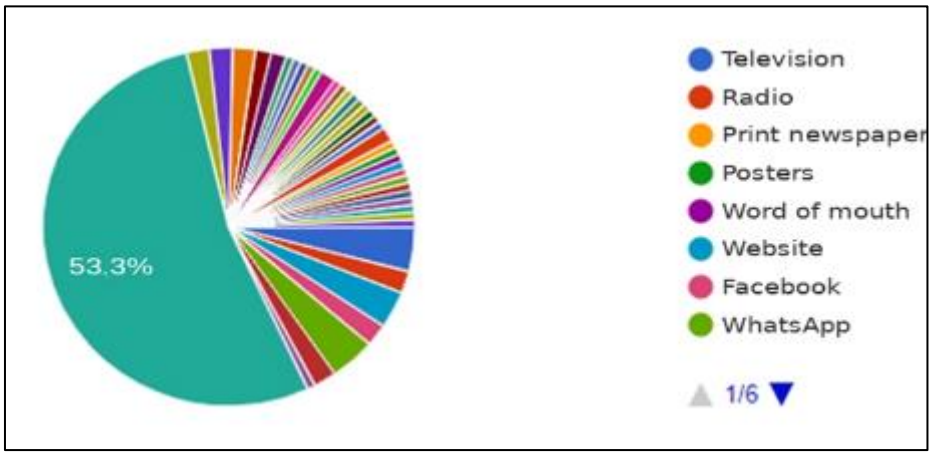


Figure 6: Distribution of Respondents by Preferred Channel for Disseminating Vision 2060

Source: Authors' field survey, 2024.

Citizens also want *Vision 2060* to be disseminated through all available communication channels, as shown by the 53% of respondents who selected this option.

4.3 Analysis of Results

The overall objective of this study is to examine the communication issues and challenges raised by the transition from the *Benin 2025 Alafia Vision* to *Vision 2060*. Effective communication depends on the strategic use of appropriate tools and techniques, which make it a key instrument for promoting the national development vision and securing support for it.

4.4 Analysis of the Interview Findings

4.4.1 Use of Communication in the Implementation of the *Benin 2025 Alafia Vision*

Achieving the objectives of a development vision requires certain prerequisites. As G. Bessette (1996, p. 9) argues:

"People's active participation is now recognised as an essential condition of the development process. Any intervention aimed at a real and lasting improvement in people's living conditions is bound to fail if the people concerned do not take ownership of it. Unless communities are involved at every level of intervention, from identifying problems to finding and implementing solutions, there will be no lasting change."

A major development project such as the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision should therefore have followed this principle. It is essential that civil society, a major actor in local development, particularly in rural areas, has effective access to communication tools (H. Ba, 2015, p. 8).

X's statement that

"*there was no communication plan during the preparation phase of the Vision, and even less during the phase when it was supposed to be implemented*" is therefore at odds with the conditions required to achieve the objectives of a development vision, as outlined above. For the state authorities and officials in charge of the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision, communication was clearly not a priority.

4.4.2 Communication Tools and Techniques Used to Promote Vision 2025

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) describes participatory development as relying on a form of communication in which traditional and modern media, community-based communication tools and various information channels are deployed to meet the needs of rural and urban communities (FAO & Ministry of Communication, 2001a, p. v).

Greater emphasis is placed on social communication than on institutional and educational communication, because it is the most appropriate way to engage communities in development efforts. This makes clear what is required, in terms of tools and techniques, to communicate effectively about a development vision. In the case of the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision, the reality falls well short of these requirements, as confirmed by a member of the Technical Steering Unit for the National Long-Term Perspective Studies (Cellule Technique de Pilotage des Études Nationales de Perspectives à Long Terme, CTP-NLTPS).

X lists the communication tools and techniques that were used: messages conveyed through short written sketches, poems recited on certain occasions, songs that were planned but never produced, a single published press article, and theatre performances intended to explain the title of the Vision 2025 document. Television, radio, print newspapers and workshops were also used.

4.4.3 Approaches to Communication for Development

Methodological thinking on communication for development generally distinguishes two major trends. The first favours large-scale actions based on the mass media; the second focuses on grassroots or community communication, giving priority to small-scale initiatives and relying mainly on light media such as video, posters and slide shows (G. Bessette, 1993, pp. 138–139).

The author argues that, when the communicator was seen merely as a transmitter of content, the target audience was reduced to a passive receiver and assimilator of information. Today, communities act as producers of their own knowledge, and the communicator's role has become that of a facilitator of this active process (ibid., p. 141).

Communication tools must also be deployed at every level of intervention, before, during and after an initiative, if genuine change is to be achieved (G. Bessette, 1996, p. 9).

The review of the communication tools and techniques associated with the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision reveals an almost complete absence of the means needed to ensure communication with a positive impact.

4.4.4 Management of Communication Tools and Techniques Used to Promote Vision 2025

The documentary review shows that the lack of reliable data on the communication tools used in rural areas, combined with the failure to assess them, undermines the achievement of the expected outcomes of a large-scale development project (FAO & Ministry of Communication, 2001b, pp. 27–31).

According to H. Ba (2015, p. 31), who examined Burkina Faso's national policy on communication for development, achieving sustainable development requires "an inventory and analysis of available resources in order to strengthen the capacities of these structures, for example by promoting a favourable legislative framework. Such strengthening must be achieved through adequate technical and financial support to improve communication practice in the field of development." The involvement of communication specialists is therefore implicitly an essential requirement, first to provide the necessary expertise and then to build the capacities of other stakeholders. In assessing the communication activities carried out for the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision, X clearly indicated that the choices made were largely shaped by the lack of communication expertise within the steering unit. As a result, no significant concrete impact had been achieved by 2024. The analysis of the communication tools and techniques deployed for the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision thus clearly demonstrates their limited effectiveness, since no qualified communication expert was involved in designing and implementing the communication approach.

4.4.5 Use of Communication for *Vision 2060*

T. Blomquist et al. (2010, p. 210) argue that practices need to be reconsidered and that project managers, rather than seeing themselves merely as technicians, should act as reflective practitioners, capable of reflecting both during and on their actions (L. Crawford et al., 2006, p. 722). This is why X recommended to the team responsible for developing Vision 2060 that the concept note should include a dedicated section on communication strategy, supported by a specific communication plan. He further stressed that, beyond integrating communication into the process, a rigorous methodology is needed to ensure a successful outcome.

Similarly, Y, who took part in the development of the previous vision, emphasised the need for a communication strategy covering the three key phases of the new development vision: before, during and after its implementation.

According to Z, a senior official at the Ministry of Planning and Coordination of Government Action and a member of the Vision 2060 steering team, the government has committed itself to ensuring continuous communication around the Vision, from its formulation through to the period after its implementation. Evidence of this commitment is the recruitment of a communication agency to develop a comprehensive communication strategy incorporating communication plans for the different phases of Vision 2060. The plan for the implementation phase is currently being prepared, and a plan for the subsequent phase will also be designed and validated. This approach draws on a range of channels, including community radio stations, digital platforms (particularly to reach Beninese citizens living abroad) and community-based communication.

Communication has thus been reconsidered as a strategic component in the promotion of Benin's Vision 2060. However, the channels mentioned by Z do not yet reflect the full scope of communication that such a development vision requires.

In the field of communication for development, the FAO (2001a, p. v) stresses that greater attention should be paid to social communication than to institutional and educational communication, because it is the most appropriate way to engage communities in development efforts. Social communication is also relational in nature and driven by the stakeholders themselves. O. Bérépa (2017, p. 53) goes further in examining the choice of communication channels and tools. In his view, the first priority is to identify the most suitable approaches for each target audience, and then to select the communication methods, or related approaches, best suited to reaching each group and bringing about the expected changes. Fundamentally, he argues that understanding people's living conditions must precede any communication initiative designed for their benefit. As he puts it: "A systematic communication process can thus bring researchers and farmers closer together. Engaging systematically with the population to learn about its opinions, capacities and needs, even before outlining a development programme, is the best guarantee a planner can have."

To meet this challenge, F. Jolivet (2003, p. 116) argues that it is necessary to define and apply what he calls "communication meta-rules" in order to manage a project successfully.

4.5 Analysis of the Quantitative Results

4.5.1 Use of Communication for the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision

S. Bertrand (2013, p. 208) states that "communication has become, alongside funding, management and mastery of technology, a fundamental step in the success of a project. Ignoring this fact means running the risk of seeing a project fail." The field survey shows that only 28% of respondents were aware of the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision, while 72% (Figure 1) had no knowledge of it. Moreover, 63.3% (Figure 3) described communication on the Vision as non-existent. The Vision is therefore far too little known among Beninese citizens for its objectives to be achieved.

As for Vision 2060, 53% of respondents were aware of it, and a majority (71%) wanted all available communication channels to be used in its formulation.

4.5.2 Communication Channels and Techniques Used to Promote Vision 2025

For a development vision such as this, the approach is participatory by nature and is regarded as a method for actively involving the target population in shaping the process (C. S. Yoon, 1996, p. 42). It includes social communication, an interactive form of communication that favours exchanges between stakeholders, negotiation, consultation, participatory approaches, the use of networks, influence strategies, spontaneous interventions and spaces for dialogue (C. Midler, 2012, p. 59).

Radio, word of mouth, television and the classroom were the channels through which information reached some of the 28% of respondents who were aware of the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision. Furthermore, the vast majority of the target population (93%) reported that they had taken part in no event or initiative promoting the Vision. This runs counter to the participatory approach to development and to the view of C. Midler (2012, p. 59), who advocates social communication, an interactive form of communication that favours exchanges between stakeholders, negotiation, consultation, participatory approaches, the use of networks, influence strategies, spontaneous interventions and spaces for dialogue.

4.5.3 Management of Communication Channels and Techniques Used to Promote the Vision

C. Midler (op. cit.) holds that a project involves creative negotiation and collective creation; in other words, a project is a vast chain of negotiations among stakeholders (J. Murtoaro and J. Kujala, 2007, p. 728). It is through this process that specialists are identified and assigned a useful role throughout the chain.

A communication expert recruited in this way, on the basis of their skills, can then bring their knowledge and expertise to bear on the Vision by proposing concrete communication channels and techniques.

When respondents were asked to assess communication on the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision, 63% described it as non-existent and 34% as unsatisfactory. This casts serious doubt on the effectiveness of the communication channels and techniques used.

4.5.4 Use of Communication for Vision 2060

The call for reassessment concerns the role of communication in projects and the need to involve stakeholders as early as possible in the course of an initiative. This is consistent with L. Bourne (2009, p. 2), who stresses the urgency of rethinking stakeholder engagement and of treating stakeholders as conditions for success.

The respondents' views are closely aligned with this reasoning: most of them want all communication channels to be used in formulating Vision 2060, as reflected in the 71% who chose this option.

Communication is thus regaining its place in the Vision 2060 process, precisely because citizens are demanding that every communication channel be used, starting with its formulation. However, the survey data on awareness of Vision 2060 show that only 2% of respondents learned about it through radio. This is surprising, given that radio is the main channel for reaching communities. Those in charge must therefore give radio the place it deserves if they are to achieve a positive long-term impact.

5 DISCUSSION

The presentation and analysis of the results clearly show that the transition from the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision to Vision 2060 raises major issues and challenges for communication for development. This finding is all the more significant given that the interest and enthusiasm observed among the population during the formulation of Vision 2060 point to a growing social demand for information, dialogue and participation. Communication should therefore no longer be seen merely as a means of disseminating public decisions, but as a strategic mechanism for the co-construction of the national development project.

A development vision becomes truly operational only when citizens understand it, discuss it and take ownership of it. The transition from the Alafia 2025 Vision to Vision 2060 therefore requires moving beyond top-down, administrative forms of outreach towards interactive, inclusive and continuous communication. The aim is to enable populations, local authorities, civil society organisations, the private sector and technical and financial partners to grasp the continuities, breaks, priorities and prospects of the new vision.

From this perspective, communication for development is a genuine compass for any development initiative that aims to be sustainable. It fosters the flow of information, attention to local concerns, the sharing of consultation results and

the mobilisation of stakeholders around shared objectives. It also helps to reduce information asymmetries between the State and citizens, an essential condition for trust, accountability and collective support for public policies.

For this reason, the communication issues and challenges of the current development vision can only be effectively aligned with development needs if they fully incorporate the principles of participatory communication. Such communication recognises populations as actors in development rather than as mere recipients of institutional messages. It involves them at every stage of the process: diagnosis, priority-setting, strategic choices, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Applied to Vision 2060, this approach calls for lasting consultation mechanisms, notably through community radio stations, digital platforms, local dialogue forums, sectoral consultations and mechanisms for reporting back on results. It also requires content to be adapted to Benin's socio-cultural, linguistic and territorial realities. Successful participatory communication would thus turn Vision 2060 into a collectively owned project, rather than a strategic document produced and disseminated by public institutions alone.

H. Ba's (2015) evaluation of Burkina Faso's national policy on communication for development offers a useful point of reference for Benin. This experience shows the importance of embedding communication for development in a clear policy framework, supported by resources, coordinated actors and monitoring indicators. It also highlights the need to strengthen the capacities of communicators, journalists, community facilitators and public officials.

For Benin, drawing on this experience could help to develop or strengthen a national policy on communication for development aligned with Vision 2060. Such a policy would help to structure interventions, prevent the fragmentation of initiatives and ensure continuity of communication across the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies.

This study contributes to research on communication for development (C4D) by examining the role of communication in long-term strategic planning. It brings together two fields that are often treated separately: public and institutional communication on the one hand, and participatory communication for development on the other. It thus shows that the effectiveness of a national vision depends less on the technical quality of its formulation than on its capacity to establish a sustained social dialogue.

The study also opens avenues for further research on the practical ways in which populations can participate in the formulation of national visions, on the use of community and digital media in public consultation, and on the effects of communication on citizens' ownership of development policies. It also calls for indicators to assess the participatory quality of institutional communication mechanisms.

Finally, participatory communication can help to prevent social tensions arising from opaque decision-making, the unequal distribution of development opportunities or insufficient attention to local needs. In a context of decentralisation, it emerges as a means of consolidating local governance and strengthening the social contract between the State, local authorities and citizens.

6 CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to examine the communication issues and challenges raised by the transition from the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision to Vision 2060.

As the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision drew to a close and the formulation of Vision 2060 was announced in November 2023, stakeholders' assessment of its unmet objectives revealed the communication weaknesses that had characterised its implementation. In this context, the prospects for a successful transition, and indeed for meeting the expectations of Vision 2060, now being formulated, depend on the extent to which communication is taken into account. This issue has prompted reflection among many observers.

Through a methodical approach, the study shed light on the formulation of the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision, its development from 1990 to 2000, the adoption in 2000 of its founding document, the *National Long-Term Perspective Studies (NLTPS-Benin 2025)*, and its implementation up to 2024. It also provided an understanding of the current dynamics surrounding Vision 2060, which is in its formulation phase.

The communication issues and challenges raised by the transition from the Benin 2025 Alafia Vision to Vision 2060 are therefore real. A development vision is a major initiative for achieving genuine and sustainable progress, and communication for development remains its driving force.

Since the communication issues and challenges surrounding Vision 2060 ultimately concern the achievement of its objectives, participatory communication offers the best path towards the progress to which the country aspires. This could be achieved through the adoption of a national policy on communication for development.

STATEMENTS ON COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding this manuscript.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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