

Communication Strategy and Community Participation in the Jogja–Solo Toll Road Project in Sleman Regency

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Abstract

The construction of the Jogja–Solo toll road is one of Indonesia's national strategic projects aimed at improving regional connectivity and accelerating economic growth. The project crosses several regions, including Sleman Regency in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, which is characterized by a dense population and strong socio-cultural structures. This study analyzes development communication strategies and forms of community participation in the implementation of the Jogja–Solo toll road project in Sleman. A qualitative descriptive method was applied through document studies, field observations, and interviews with community leaders and local government officials. The findings reveal that development communication was conducted through formal socialization, face-to-face meetings, public consultations, local media, and engagement with community leaders. Community participation emerged in various forms, such as consultation meetings, village deliberations, involvement in land acquisition, and expressing aspirations related to social and environmental impacts. Several challenges were identified, including uneven access to information, limited two-way dialogue in the early stages, and differing levels of technical understanding. The study concludes that transparent, participatory, and context-sensitive communication is essential to ensure the project's social acceptance and sustainability.

Keyword:

Communication strategy, community participation, Jogja–Solo toll road

1. INTRODUCTION

Infrastructure development plays a key role in supporting regional economic growth, improving accessibility, and enhancing community welfare. The Jogja–Solo toll road project, spanning approximately 96.57 km, connects two major cities in Central Java and Yogyakarta. As part of Indonesia's National Strategic Projects (PSN), this toll road aims to facilitate logistics flow, improve travel efficiency, and stimulate regional development. Sleman Regency is a strategic area in this development, not only because of its geographic location but also because of its social characteristics. It is densely populated, culturally rooted, and economically diverse. Infrastructure projects of this scale often bring both opportunities and challenges: improved accessibility and economic growth on the one hand, and land conversion, social changes, and potential community resistance on the other. Development communication serves as a crucial bridge between government planning and community acceptance. Ineffective communication can result in resistance, misinformation, or conflicts. This study focuses on analyzing development communication strategies implemented in the Jogja–Solo toll road project in Sleman Regency and Exploring forms of community participation in the project's planning and implementation stages. Rogers (1976) defined development communication as a process of disseminating innovations through specific channels over time among members of a social system. In infrastructure development, communication facilitates public understanding, builds trust, and encourages behavioral change. Development communication has evolved from a top–down information dissemination model to a participatory, dialogical approach. Early models, often called the “modernization paradigm,” treated communities as passive recipients of development initiatives. However, contemporary approaches emphasize that communities are active agents whose knowledge, values, and aspirations shape the success of development programs (Servaes, 2008).

In the context of infrastructure projects, development communication involves not only informing communities but also engaging them in planning, decision-making, and monitoring. Effective communication ensures that affected populations understand project objectives, potential impacts, and opportunities to participate in shaping outcomes. According to Mefalopulos (2008), participatory communication fosters trust, reduces conflicts, and increases project sustainability. Cohen and Uphoff (1980) conceptualized community participation as active involvement of citizens in various stages of development: planning, implementation, and evaluation. Participation can take consultative, collaborative, or self-initiated forms, depending on the level of community empowerment and government engagement. The interviews conducted revealed a spectrum of perceptions among community members for Supportive Attitudes: Some residents perceived the toll road as a catalyst for local economic growth, expecting improved access to markets, tourism development, and increased land values. These groups were generally more informed through local government channels and often included community leaders or business owners and Neutral/Uncertain Attitudes: A portion of the community remained undecided, primarily due to limited information. They expressed neither strong opposition nor full support but raised concerns about potential relocation, compensation adequacy, and long-term economic impacts. The next, Resistant Attitudes: A smaller but significant group opposed the project due to fear of losing ancestral land, environmental degradation, or cultural disruption. These groups tended to rely on informal communication channels, which sometimes spread misinformation or rumors. These findings align with Rogers' diffusion of innovation theory, where communities adopt innovations at different rates depending on access to information, perceived benefits, and trust in the communicator. The Jogja–Solo toll road project, due to its large scale, involves complex negotiations between government institutions, private contractors, and communities. Communication strategies need to address diverse audiences, including landowners, local businesses, religious organizations, and vulnerable groups. Failure to do so can result in delays, legal disputes, or public opposition, as seen in several infrastructure projects in Indonesia. The Jogja–Solo toll road has been designated as a National Strategic Project to accelerate inter-regional connectivity. While its economic benefits are clear, the project also entails challenges such as land acquisition, changes in spatial planning, and socio-environmental impacts that require careful communication and participatory approaches.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to explore the dynamics of development communication and community participation. Data collection techniques included for Document Study – Analysis of government regulations, media reports, environmental impact assessment documents, and public consultation reports and then Field Observations – Observations were conducted in affected areas in Sleman Regency, particularly in Tempel District and the next Semi-structured Interviews – Conducted with 6 community leaders, 2 local government officials, and 1 representative from the implementing contractor. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Triangulation of sources and methods was applied to maintain validity.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Several communication strategies were employed for example; Formal Socialization: Government agencies, such as the Ministry of Public Works and Public Housing and the National Land Agency (BPN), conducted official village meetings and technical presentations and Local Media Dissemination: Information was spread through local radio, billboards, and newspapers to reach broader audiences, next Public Consultation Forums: These allowed residents to provide feedback on toll road alignment and compensation schemes, next Community Leader Engagement: Religious and cultural leaders were involved to build trust and bridge communication gaps between government and residents. Community participation appeared in several forms for example; Public Consultations: Residents expressed concerns regarding land boundaries, compensation amounts, and social impacts and Village Deliberations: Communities discussed relocation of public facilities, road access adjustments, and benefit distribution, the next Land Acquisition Involvement: Communities participated actively in land measurement and valuation processes, the next Passive Participation: Some residents received information but did not actively participate, especially those in peripheral areas. Despite various strategies, several obstacles emerged for example; Technical Knowledge Gaps: Communities had difficulty understanding technical aspects of the project and Unequal Information Access: Some groups received information earlier than others, the next Limited Two-way Dialogue: Early

stages relied heavily on top-down communication, next Concerns Over Socio-economic Impacts: Issues such as land price, livelihood shifts, and environmental changes were not always addressed promptly. The findings emphasize that communication in large infrastructure projects cannot be one-directional. Participatory approaches and transparent information sharing are crucial to foster trust and minimize conflict. Involving community leaders and creating accessible information channels enhanced understanding and acceptance among affected communities.

4. CONCLUSION

The communication strategies employed in the Jogja–Solo toll road project in Sleman Regency combined formal socialization, local media, and public forums. While these approaches facilitated information dissemination, challenges remained in ensuring equal access and meaningful participation, for example; Strengthen two-way communication through open village forums and Provide clear, easily understandable information to affected communities, and then Integrate local leaders into communication teams and the next Include community input early in the planning process to build ownership and reduce resistance. Local governments and traditional leaders play an intermediary role in facilitating communication between project implementers and communities. In Sleman, village heads (lurah), religious figures (kyai), and cultural elders were often consulted to help disseminate information and legitimize government messages. Their involvement is critical because they possess social capital—trust, networks, and cultural authority—that external actors lack. According to Putnam (1993), strong social capital enhances cooperation and collective action. In this case, when leaders endorsed the project or clarified misunderstandings, community resistance decreased. Conversely, when leaders were not fully involved in early planning, gaps in communication widened, leading to speculation and mistrust. A comparative analysis with other toll road projects in Indonesia, such as the Trans-Java Toll Road and the Balikpapan–Samarinda Toll Road, highlights common patterns:

- a. Early Communication Determines Acceptance: Projects with early and transparent communication processes experienced fewer disputes
- b. Participatory Planning Reduces Conflict: In areas where communities were involved in adjusting alignment routes, land acquisition proceeded more smoothly.
- c. Media Strategy Matters: Using multiple media platforms (radio, print, online, and face-to-face) increased information penetration
- d. Cultural Sensitivity Is Essential: Projects that acknowledged local customs and involved traditional institutions gained more support.

The Jogja–Solo project partially adopted these strategies but still faced challenges in ensuring equal access to information and meaningful participation for marginalized groups. The Jogja–Solo toll road project provides a rich case study on how development communication functions in large-scale infrastructure initiatives in Indonesia. The project illustrates both the potential and limitations of communication strategies in bridging the gap between government plans and community realities. The findings suggest that communication should be understood not merely as information transfer but as a dialogical process where communities are active partners. Early, transparent, and culturally sensitive communication builds trust and facilitates smoother project implementation. Conversely, delayed or one-way communication contributes to uncertainty, resistance, and potential conflict. Community participation in the Sleman section of the project demonstrates varying degrees of engagement. While some groups embraced the project for its perceived economic benefits, others expressed resistance rooted in socio-cultural and environmental concerns. Addressing these diverse perspectives requires adaptable communication models and genuine participation mechanisms. Future infrastructure development in Indonesia can benefit from adopting a communication governance framework that integrates participatory principles into every stage of the project cycle—planning, implementation, monitoring, and post-construction evaluation.

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