

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: THE ISSUE OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

In an increasing globalised society, where communication and development ranked among the essential needs of man, information and economic choices is in the increase. These choices, however, are based on strategic communication that is meant to convince the listener and consequently participate in project that will enhance his life endeavour. On this premise this paper discusses the trends of development programmes and rural development using strategic communication and or development communication strategy. Specifically, radio is being employed to disseminate the necessary information to the target audience or clientele. Other issues such as World Health Organisation and health matters; UNICEF and education matters in rural radio vis-à-vis modern communication were also highlighted.

Introduction

Nigeria's rural development programmes like that of other development nations depend for its ultimate success on its rural population who make up to 80% of the entire population. Modernization process in this country is mainly restricted to urban areas; where new ideas are imparted, debated and exchanged. Even then the process of modernization is often fragmented and sporadic. One major reason is that the media which disseminate information, news and opinions are based in the cities and mostly direct their comments to the urban or semi-urban population (Moemeka 1982). If radio broadcasting is to be used to support the present aspiration of Nigeria such as that of emancipating and transforming the rural communities through basic literacy, health care, agriculture, general awareness, etc, then there must be a new restructuring of broadcasting in order to accomplish this task. For instance, the delivery of health care to scattered populations such as the type in Nigeria is difficult in the following sense;

1. The cost of providing the population with direct access to medical professionals;
2. The cultural barriers between the urban-based health care providers and the users; and
3. The impact of external service organizations and institutions or agents (e.g. The World Health Organizations, The Carter Foundation, etc) on the delicate socio-ecological balance of the country.

To be able to cut across these impediments there is the need to spread the sphere of action of rural development programmes across the community. This could be achieved by using the mass media notably radio and various levels of personnel at different locations. For instance development programmes and/or projects on health care can be transmitted on local radio stations to all parts of the country interconnecting all the personnel via voice communication. In this light education becomes a prime motivation to action that permeates all aspects of rural community development. The type of education being referred to here is one that is concerned with creation of an environment in which awareness, aspirations and willingness to work in order to develop and progress is the ultimate goal.

Fundamentally, meeting the manpower and knowledge needs for a broad based rural community development requires a radically new approach to formal and non formal education in rural areas.

Development Communication

Development communication, simply defined, is the use of communication to provide social development. More specifically, it refers to the practice of systematically applying the processes, strategies and principles of communication to bring about positive social change (Nora, 1973). It is thus referred as strategic communication.

The theory and practice of development communication continues to evolve today, with different approaches and perspectives unique to the varied development contexts that the field has grown (Manyozo, 2006). Development communication is characterized by conceptual flexibility and diversity of communication techniques used to address problems. Some approaches in the "tool kit" of the field include: information dissemination and education, behaviour change, social marketing, social mobilization, media advocacy, communication for social change and participatory development communication.

Meaningful communication is about getting information out to particular audiences, listening to their feedback and responding appropriately. Whether discussing a development project or broader economic reforms – from health, education or rural development to private sector development, the idea is to build consensus through raising public understanding and generating well-informed dialogue among stakeholders. Well conceived, professionally implemented communication programmes are those that are tied to reform efforts or development project objectives that bring understanding or local social and cultural realities to bear in the design of development programmes that can make difference between a project's success and or failure.

Non-Formal Education in Rural community

The problem of rural community education is one that has been lately neglected in Nigeria. Whenever the concept is mentioned, it is often taken to mean education in the rural area, and the impression is given that this is already being provided in formal education for the young and youths and some literacy teaching, health care and agricultural information for adults. However, rural education is wider concept than education in the rural areas. While the latter isolates the factor of education and treats it distinctly from other aspects of life in the rural areas, the former see education as an inseparable, part of the whole spectrum of activities in the rural areas (Ngwa, 2006). However, non-formal education in this context refer to any unorganised educational activity outside the established formal system whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity that is intended to serve identifiable target or clientele.

For quite a long time, the desire to promote this type of education in the rural areas has been deeply felt by educationist and mass communicators in this country. This is because the country's large rural population can hinder national development if it is not provided with the requisite skills, knowledge, attitudes, etc, that would enable them contribute meaningfully to national development. According to the 2006 national headcount, out of the 140 million people in Nigeria 82.3 million is rural (National Population Commission 2006). Therefore, the need for rural education programmes can be understood, for a country with such a large number of its population in the rural areas. No meaningful development may be achieved without their active participation in the nation's development programmes. That was why in 1994 at a National Conference National development: The Rural Action Integration, some professional bodies drew the attention of the nation to the need for a general 'mobilization' of the rural population towards development objectives in the country's 5-yearly development plan by using strategic communication approach.

The first to express such desire was the Nigeria National Council on Adult Education (NNCAE) in July 1974. The Council called for the establishment of a national Institute of Adult Education to be charged with the responsibility for coordinating and promoting all out of school educational activities in the country with a view to improving the material conditions of the people, especially living in the rural areas. The Nigeria Association for Educational Media and Technology (NAEMT), made a similar call in the same year for the establishment of a National Broadcasting Services to be responsible for all educational broadcasts, and to pay particular attention to the problems of educating the general public particularly the rural masses. However, the newly established National Broadcasting Commission, is more of regulatory body than one that advocates or synthesizes the public on topical issues e.g. Health, Education, Employment etc.

These resolutions were supported by the West African Regional Seminar on Mass Communication Research. One of the themes of the seminar was the need to use radio for real adult education. The forum endorsed the idea that radio is potentially a powerful means for community education especially in countries with transformation problems, and scattered and far flung rural populations (Moemeka 1982).

However, it is not that there are no rural education programmes in Nigeria. Schools broadcasting is one of the services that are being provided by the federal and states broadcasting corporations in the country. These services include formal and non formal education programmes. Programmes are based on school syllabuses and are integrated to supplement the teacher's efforts and enrich his/her lesson by providing extra information which may not be easily available. In addition the broadcasting corporations spend some of their air time on general educational programmes which aim to disseminate information on national events, the political, social and economic conditions of the society. But this provision omits completely the majority of the people, who neither pursue formal education nor live in or near the urban areas. The masses of the people who are illiterate peasant farmers and their families, village artisans, opinion leaders and head of families were not until recently being catered for educationally, by use of radio medium.

In order to reduce this disparity, the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation introduced provincial broadcasting in the 1950s. In 1935 and 1947 some Radio Distribution Service Centres were established in 13 provisional headquarters in the country. They were later renamed and restructured as programmes originating centres, though they remained largely as distribution centres for regional stations except Katsina, Onitsa, Owerri and Zaria which since the creation of nineteen states in 1976 (though there are 36 states now) were transformed into state broadcasting corporations (Egbon, 1978). In their day-to-day

operations these stations did little to show that they were expected to cater for the specific needs of the communities in which they are situated, they were in the community not for the community. The few programmes which aim at serving the local community's interests were the musical request programmes, and weekly magazine programmes.

This minimal effect of the existing radio programmes on the lives of the rural people in the Northern part of Nigeria became a matter of concern to some institutions of higher learning, notably the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The University's Centre for Continuing Education realized the potentials of radio broadcasting for educating the scattered communities in an era where other communication channels were ineffective and transportation facilities were so poor. So in 1971 it created a unit called Education Extension Unit. The Unit is responsible for educating and enlightening the public. It started a radio programme known as "University of the Air" and "Hausa by Radio" in collaboration with Radio Nigeria Kaduna. This unit also caters for the educational interests of the rural communities providing through radio, useful information and guidance on topics such as health, sanitation, culture, history, family life etc. Programmes were written by University staff who were specialists on the different themes and topics which were then transmitted by Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) Kaduna and Kaduna State Broadcasting Corporation (now Kaduna State Media Corporation (KSMC)).

However, in some of these programmes the people were mere passive listeners. The three reasons for this were:

1. The base of the broadcasting was too far away from the majority of these listeners to engender their greater involvement in the production of programmes. The survey conducted in 1974, it was found out that the further away one moved from Zaria and Kaduna (the home of the broadcasting houses), the fewer the audience;
2. The majority of the listeners of the programmes were passive due to the separation of the providing personnel from the receiving audience. There was very little contact between them. In fact very few of the Unit's staff had first hand knowledge of the social, political, economic and cultural situations of the people for whom they produced programmes. Most of the programmes though seemingly relevant, were always based on first hand identification of urgent needs as indicated by the audience. Although requests for specific programmes did reach the unit, these requests usually came from areas where there already was a sizeable audience. But such requests were few and the number of people involved, in comparison to the total populations concerned was insignificant. This lack of contact with the rural population was due to the fact that the unit had no out-reach

staff in the remote parts of its areas of activity which included the whole of Northern Nigeria;

3. There was also very little contact between the producer (the Centre), and broadcasting and education authorities in programme planning, script writing and programmed production. Coordination in the field has not grown to appreciable level, because coordination staff were posted to the areas where the target audience lived. The impact of the broadcast (produced by the unit) on the lives of the rural communities was minimal (Murphy, 1974).

In spite of these shortcomings, they played an important pioneering role in educational broadcasting for rural development. Even though, the broadcasting authorities in Nigeria tried to direct their activities to substantial number of the population, yet about 85% of the population who are barely or completely illiterate and live in the rural areas rarely benefit from their activities. This is a misplacement of priorities. The correct thing to do would have been to direct more efforts towards the education of those who are not educated, especially when the uneducated out-numbered the educated. And because this uneducated population live in widely scattered communities, one of the best ways of ensuring that educational efforts benefits the community to use a medium that is capable of reaching every community, and especially radio.

Radio broadcasting could be an effective medium for rural community development, provided access and participation is granted to the audience. There are examples from different countries of the successful use of radio to the intellectual and living standards, of rural communities, and for rural transformation and emancipation. Prominent among them are Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Gambia, Columbia, Honduras and Ecuador (Geoff, 2002). Thus for radio to help supplement the job of a teacher, the broadcasting and education authorities should double their efforts to make radio messages reach the desirable audience.

The Use of the Mass Media for National Development

In a country like Nigeria, where there has been a cultural break due to imposition and subsequent withdrawal of colonialism, it will be vital to the development of that nation to focus on some of the consequences of that (cultural) break when one studies the role of the mass media as an agent of national development and political socialization. Many Nigerians have become "Europeanized" through education. Besides there had been no cultural continuity and persistence in Nigeria, to a large extent, as a result of the forceful injection of discordant alien institutions into its cultural stream of consciousness by the British Colonial administration. Political instability in part of the world today testify that

the country still suffers from the traumatic break with its cultural past, due to the wholesale jettisoning of all the earlier African values and norms for the foreign British culture and values. The media's roles under such circumstances are certainly very challenging.

Media system caught in this mid-stream of modernization may also have imposed on them the minority ruling elitist ideas neo-colonialist overtones. This is certainly a big dilemma to say the least. Lucian Pye, Wilbur Schramm and McAnanny some of the foremost proponents of media usage in the developing world, have isolated three categories in which the mass media can be best used, especially in Africa (Frey, 1973) are:

1. The creation of a national spirit
2. Improvement of the educational system; and
3. The modernization of the economic system.

The most crucial, by far, is inculcating national awareness among the citizens of the newly independent nations. This was of singular significance in Nigeria, considering the great odds confronting broadcasting by the very nature of the country, there were the problems of scattered population, distance, ethnic and regional divisions, language multiplicity and cultural diversity. The watchword of the planners was "unity in diversity". The intention was to labour toward a gradual realization of a common Nigerian heritage, at the same time ensuring that none of the federation regions was swallowed up. Their respective distinctive local qualities and tastes were to be safeguarded and preserved. As a result, Nigeria at independence spawned four separate broadcasting stations at the same time instead of one as in many other African countries. The reason for this proliferation could be ascribed to the existence of regional rather than national loyalties. The absence of a dominant nationally based political party certainly weakened the concept of one all Nigeria Broadcasting organization, the three-tier.

Broadcasting structure, modeled after the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), was intended to serve all areas of the country with its programme both from the national, regional, and provincial stations. But later events proved this assumption wrong. The events that led to the civil war came the situation was exacerbated by the regional government owned radio stations.

While the regional stations promoted the interest of each regional government, it was only the national station in the nation's capital, controlled by the Federal Government, which was committed to promoting the unity of the nation. A big lesson was learned

during the war regarding the role of radio in fostering the national consciousness. Now, the government has decided to take absolute control of all the broadcasting stations in the country, so that it can better programme its content to suit its purpose of promoting national unity and national development. Whether this step is the right thing to do in this circumstance is however a moot point.

These buttresses of the claim that extrapolating the less developed country's needs from models of the more developed countries can be misleading. Beyond all the political, economic and educational duties the mass media can help perform, the most important function of communications in institution building, according to type, is to create an environment of easy human relationships so that man can more effectively deal with man (Egbon, 1978 p. 45). It is apparent that most of the frequent squabbles and administrative breakdowns and *coup d'etat* in the emerging nations (mostly African nations) have stemmed chiefly from communication breakdown among the political actors.

However, to strike a good balance between these opposing circumstance, much depends on the caliber and interrelationship of the communication planners and national policymakers. In other words, it takes an enlightened leadership to build a mass media system which is capable of harnessing all the component parts of the administration together to foster national development.

The planning and implementation of nation-building policies call for an appreciation of not only the many facets of development but also the interrelationship among them. The intellectual preparation for policy making thus calls for a sense of perspective and basic orientation which will highlight the possible levers which may move the process of development along constructive lines (Egbon 1978).

Conclusion

It would seem as if the general or rather frequent failures of the mass media in development countries rest on this major thrust- lack of sophisticated political leaders. This may also account for why the mass media are generally muzzled by the ruling administration in frantic attempts to insulate itself from possible criticism by its public.

From the researcher's personal experience and knowledge of the Nigerian situation, it would profit the country more if properly trained, professionally qualified personnel are recruited, at least, to head mass media institutions in this developing nation, in that case these educated media experts may be able to carry the appropriate ideas about the institution across to the policy makers, without of incompetence. This may serve to bring

understanding of order and power that can come from the establishment of political institutions which ultimately depend upon a process of sharing common perceptions, cognitions, and emotional sentiments. Here the mass media can set or generate tone of social communication for the whole society.

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