

## Communication and Development in Nigeria: A Discussion

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### Abstract

*Communication has been integral to Nigeria's development since the amalgamation which brought the country into existence as a corporate entity in 1914.*

*This paper discusses development communication in Nigeria based on the operationalisation of the twin concepts of communication and development. It examines trends from the pre-colony, through the colony to the post-colony and highlights the sub-optimal utilisation of development communication based on an inadequate grasp of its potentials or manipulation by participants in the process, especially government which dominates communication and development processes in Nigeria.*

*While there is a growing awareness of an increasing incorporation of development communication principles in various intervention programmes, a fundamental re-orientation and de-bureaucratisation of the processes relating to the utilisation of the concept, are critical to its greater relevance to the development of Nigeria.*

### Introduction

In 1914, Lord Frederick Lugard said, let there be Nigeria, and there was Nigeria. Although this is not a quote from the former colonial administrator of Nigeria, it is representative, in a sense, of the way the country came into existence.

The allusion to the creation story is indicative of the close relationship between the communication process and the development process in Nigeria. The British colonial authorities decided to amalgamate the northern and southern protectorates of Nigeria and this was implemented by Lord Lugard through a declaration backed by the necessary legal instruments. The birth of the geographical entity called Nigeria, therefore, was an outcome of communication and a measure of its effectiveness.

Before that historical landmark, Nigeria as a geographical land space was occupied by kingdoms and ethnic groupings and nationalities, so diverse, heterogeneous and sometimes fiercely protective of their identities, that amalgamation may have been considered impossible. Although there were commercial, socio-cultural

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and political relationships, these were structured along the lines of a political order which recognised boundaries and constantly responded to the shifting political climate and conflict situations. Existing cleavages along ethnic lines did not leave much hope for the rather dramatic political engineering fostered by British colonialism and climaxing in the amalgamation of 1914.

Developments since that epochal event, in the post-colony and since independence, further confirm the symbiotic relationship between communication and national development. The relationship is so natural that it is often understated, sometimes unacknowledged, but pervasive in its consequence.

A further analysis of this relationship in the Nigerian context will be preceded by a closer examination of the key concepts.

## Communication

Communication is an evidence of life, a crucial indicator of existence. It defines a being and in whatever form expressed, reflects a communion, characteristic of the interaction which is expressed verbally or non-verbally – from the pulse of a person lying prostrate at the scene of a fatal accident, to the music star belting out hit songs to the rapturous ovation of a captive audience, to a mass medium interpreting and disseminating its version of the truth and its vision of the world.

In spite of similarities in the operationalisation of the concept, there are variations in its definition. While the International Broadcast Institute explains communication as the transfer by human or technical means of information between persons or groups of individuals (Moemeka, 1994A: 10), its interactive character is stressed by others (Obasanjo and Mabogunje, 1991: 118). They explain it as a process which involves the impartation of ideas, values, information, knowledge and feelings within society. Lasswell describes the act of communication as “who says what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect” (Lasswell, 1977: 84).

These show that communication is a dynamic process (DeVito, 1992: 24) involving various actors who of necessity interact. Since it takes place at the interpersonal, group and mass media levels, communication is a social imperative which is characteristic of relations within society. It explains to a significant extent why society is shaped the way it is and why specific developments take place or fail to take place and why as Folger, *et al* put it, conflict interaction could assume positive or negative dimensions in society (Folger, *et al*, 1997: 11). The fact that communication is also intrapersonal, explains individual characteristics and contributions to the communication chain.

To state that communication is central to human and societal existence is, therefore, another way of acknowledging the obvious. The awareness by the public of the existence of a government initiative, or even the actualisation of such an initiative or the outcome of such an initiative, are significantly communication dependent.

However, it is important to make a distinction between communication and information in order to better appreciate the relevance of communication to development.

As Moemeka has noted:

*Unlike in information, communication is not merely talking to people, it is not talking at people, it is not even talking about people. It is talking with people. It is an interactive activity directed at creating enlightenment, understanding and education through discussion in order that intelligent decisions could be made and relevant actions taken (Moemeka, 1994B: 7).*

Fisher has also highlighted the difference between communication and information in an analysis published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, UNESCO (Fisher, 1982: 13–14).

The functions of communication as enunciated by Lasswell (1977:85), further highlight this symbiosis. Since communication enables the surveillance of the environment, the correlation of the parts of society and the transmission of the social heritage, it enables a linkage between the past, present and the future in society, defines the currents and undercurrents of the present and facilitates the continuity which define the dynamic character of society.

It is therefore inconceivable to imagine development without communication, as the various denominators of development are moderated by the communication process. It will be difficult to imagine education, health and other intervention programmes without communication. In fact, the much chorused power of the mass media and their acknowledged relevance to national development, flow from their being channels of communication and crucial players in today's information society.

In their traditional roles of educating, informing and entertaining, mass media have moved from the hypodermic needle phase of unidirectional transfer of content through a passive audience to an interactive phase involving a most-often active audience and a cyclical flow. The latter phase of the highly interactive media is probably better exemplified by the current call-in programmes fad which has become the staple of electronic media in Nigeria.

Schramm provides a framework for mass media influence in the development process. He identifies areas such as the capacity of the mass media to confer status, focus attention on issues, create an enabling environment for development, and affecting attitudes, as measures of their influence on the development process (Schramm, 1964).

These influences are discernible from the increase in mass media organisations and the roles these media have played in the evolution of the Nigerian State. According to Akinfeleye (2003: 44–45, 52), there are 244 television stations in the country. Of this, 148 are owned by the federal government through the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), 64 belong to state governments and 32 are privately owned. There are 95 radio stations of which five are network stations belonging

to the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) which also has 32 FM stations, 36 state government-owned stations, and 22 private stations, four of which are specialised – covering French programmes, hard news, sports and education/academic programmes. As at December 2002, there were 67 newspapers and magazines, mainly privately-owned.

In the colony and the post-colony, mass media have been especially active in moderating the political process in Nigeria. They have served as instruments of war by other means. Media ownership patterns of concentration in the hands of the economic and political elite are indicators of their acknowledged impact in society.

The media are as much tools for raising individual profiles and lifting obscure local figures to prominence as they have become inseparable components of intervention programmes designed to promote development. These all show the primacy of communication to development.

## Development

The central theme which run through the various attempts to define development is change. According to Obasanjo and Mabogunje (1991: 119).

*Development (is) a process concerned with people's capacity in a defined area, over a defined period, to manage and induce change, that is to predict, plan, understand and monitor change. The more people develop, the more they become instruments for further change.*

Moemeka explains that,

*It is a movement (change) from existing conditions that are no longer conducive to societal or group goals and aspirations to those that can meet those goals and aspirations (Moemeka, 1998)*

Adedeji sees development as a process and collective responsibility leading to fundamental and sustainable changes in society. It involves growth and is inclusive of aspects of the quality of life like democratisation, social justice, equality of opportunity, equity in the distribution of income (Asante, 1991: 5–9). According to him, the concepts of national and collective self-reliance and self-sustaining development are fundamental in a discussion of development. Both concepts suggest that internal needs should be the criteria or stimulus for development.

Teheranian (1977: 26–34) identifies key attributes of this process as increasing production, pollution, welfare, mobilisation, dislocation, participation, differentiation, bureaucratisation, integration, communication, cognitive dissonance, plurality, individuation, conformity, adaptation, rationalisation, alienation and innovation.

Five effects summarise the experiences of development in developing countries like Nigeria. These include:

- i) Demonstration Effects, which are the outcome of attempts, through the adoption of the methods of the more developed by the less developed.

- ii) Fusion Effects, involving a combination of the key attributes of different “developed” social systems by the less developed.
- iii) Compression Effects, which are summarised by attempts by the developing to spend less time in achieving development than the developed ones.
- iv) Preventive Effects, which are attempts by the developing to be more cost-effective in human, material and environmental terms than the industrialized countries.
- v) Stylistic Effects, which are evident in the retention of the unique features of culture and national identity.

The progression of theory in the analysis of the concept of development is indicative of the natural interest in the subject as well as the dynamic phases in its development.

Servaes offers a broad overview of the various theories. The Modernization paradigm treated development as economic growth and supported the transfer of technology and socio-political culture from developed to the developing societies, while the Dependency Paradigm acknowledges the conditioning of a group of economies by the development of others. The Multiplicity and Another Development Paradigm targets the satisfaction of needs, is concerned with the eradication of poverty, is endogenous and self-reliant and in harmony with the environment. The Mixed Approaches reveal shifts in the three perspectives from, for instance, endogenous to exogenous explanations, to globalism and holism, from the prescriptive and predictable processes to change-oriented and less predictable ones (Servaes, 1994).

While there is a broad acknowledgement of these imperatives of national development, the African and Nigerian experience have raised questions on not just the operationalisation of the concept of development, but the processes and strategies deployed in attempts to achieve it.

This has called to question the role of the state as moderators of this strategic imperative. As Osaghae (1988:38) has noted, the dominance by government of the development process has seriously eroded the capacity of the people to actualise their potentials and meet their aspirations, with the consequence of unfulfilled dreams, legitimacy crisis and fundamental credibility problems for government. It has also stimulated a more rigorous and systematic discussion of the subject of communication and development or development communication.

## **Development Communication**

The failures of the development process and the subordination of the potentials of actors in the process have fuelled a closer examination of how communication being inseparable from the logic of human existence in society, can be better deployed in the task of effecting desirable changes in the same society.

Development communication therefore transcends the mere transfer of desirable information. It is an encompassing term premised on the understanding of development in physical (material) and human terms. It emphasises access to the media, socio-cultural relevance of communication content and participation in the communication process by the subjects or beneficiaries of development initiatives. It generates empathy, raises aspiration, teaches new skills and facilitates a reorientation in the attitudes of the people (Moemeka, 1994: 9–15). It is therefore a systematic process leading to specific outcomes which ought to translate to development. The end products of development communication are conditioned by any or a combination of methods adopted in specific interventions.

Moemeka (1994C: 55) elaborates on these approaches which include:

- The Interpersonal which consists of two methods, namely the Extension and Community Development method which is primed at rural development, and the Ideological and Mass Mobilisation method which relies heavily on interpersonal channels like political party cadres.
- The Mass Media Approach also consists of two methods – the Centralised Mass Media method which stresses media control by a central authority – experts in urban media operating centres, and the Localised (Decentralised) Mass Media method which is hinged on interaction with the audience. The Integrated Approach combines both interpersonal and mass media as well as traditional methods of communication.

Patterns in the area of development communication approaches in Nigeria show fluctuations in the recourse to development support communication. While there is some evidence that the Diffusion Model still plays a role in the country's development process, there are also indications of the use of the Participatory Model and the poor management of the latter model in spite of proclamations by implementers, of the wholesale adoption of the Participatory Model in the increasing number of intervention programmes midwived by either the government or other players in the development equation.

### **Contextual Considerations**

The foregoing contextualisation of the debate on the roles of communication in national development is an attempt to establish the relevance of given elements to our focus. In spite of strides in the mainstreaming of communication, especially media content, in line with the new globalism, Nigeria has always offered an interesting scenario for the study of communication and national development.

In the pre-colony, socio-political structures allowed a context for the use of communication in societal development. That period witnessed a preponderant recourse to the use of traditional media and interpersonal channels. These structures allowed the dissemination of information and had feedback systems in place,

although, there was the logic of traditional authority exercised by often powerful rulers. Communication took on a diffusion approach with the local network guaranteeing the speedy flow of such communication to other sections of society (Ugboajah, 1989: 235–236). The level of participation of the citizenry in decisions affecting them, depended on specific cultural contexts and the degree of freedom of expression exercisable by the individual.

Till date, traditional media have remained important transmission belts for development messages. This echoes in the fact that in spite of rapid urbanisation, rural Nigeria where they are put to significant use still harbours most of the country's population. What is questionable is the use to which these media are put, the content of specific communication, the criteria for participation, and the commitment of such players to the goals of development.

The colony witnessed the entry and gradual growth of mass media in Nigeria. The formal media increasingly became the preferred option in official communication by the colonial authorities and right from the Newspaper Ordinance No. 10 of 1903, government showed the premium it placed on mass-mediated communication by trying to minimise the potential damage of the opposition. Other gag laws followed, but the political class also demonstrated its understanding of the power of information and communication through the establishment of private newspapers.

The defunct *West African Pilot*, owned by the late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, first president of independent Nigeria under the Westminster system, was a key player in the struggle for independence. The *Nigerian Tribune* which was also active in the nationalist struggle and had as proprietor, the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo, former premier of Western Region, is, however, still surviving.

Gag laws showed the intolerance by government of other actors in the development process who, no matter their potential contribution to the task of development, were either partially or totally sidelined. This inevitably meant that right from the pre-colony and especially since the colony, a framework had been established which did not enable the total involvement of all participants in the process, to impact on the country's development. Whatever was then defined as communication did not conform with all the specifications of the concept. This may have led to the inevitable polarisation of the media along the establishment and opposition divide, even when there is a broad appreciation by the opposing players of the various development dilemmas which should be addressed.

Independence changed the guards but not necessarily the orientation in official attitudes to the role of communication in national development. Before then, the change in the early years of radio in Nigeria, from a Radio Distribution Service in 1936 to the Information Office in 1940 and to a Public Relations Department in 1947 (Owens Ibie, 1991: 209), provided indications of the thinking of government and its model of the role of communication in development. The bureaucratisation of information structures and laws like the Official Secrets Act of 1962, further mystified the machinery of government and narrowed the options in the use of

communication. The management of information appeared less systematic, and often reactive.

While government maintained a grip on the communication process, the public and journalists played secondary roles. Such dominance was evident at the policy level in media ownership patterns and in the virtual monopoly of the news by functionaries of government (Obasanjo and Mabogunje, 1991:119).

There was however, evidence of the effective use of media in campaigns related to specific programmes of government. In the old Adamawa Province (covering about 885 kilometres) during the 1963 census, vital information was disseminated throughout the area within hours, using traditional media (Obasanjo and Mabogunje, 1991:118).

Various other uses of the media have recorded degrees of success. Officials of military regimes were known to reach out to civil society through various interpersonal channels. Governors organised People's Parliament where they communicated with civil society. One such session was held on January 30, 1986 by the then governor of Rivers State, retired Police Commissioner Fidelis Oyakhilome.

The granting of licenses to private operators in the electronic media in Nigeria has assisted the broadening of the base of participation in the communication process. The concentration of these stations in urban centres constrain their relevance to most of the population. As Olukotun (2002:101) explains, the urban and elite bias of the media and their neglect of the rural areas are reflections of the underdevelopment of the country's media. In a content analysis of Nigerian newspapers by Adigun Agbaje, cited by Olukotun:

*49% of stories sampled focused on the central government, 41.3% on regional or state governments, while a mere 5.9% focused on local governments...873 stories (were) on national affairs, 97.6% were sourced from urban areas while a mere 2.4% were sourced from rural areas*

Although this study was conducted in the 1980s, there is as yet no indication of a shift in this pattern of media coverage. However, the democratisation of the mass media space, in spite of concentrating ownership in the hands of government and a group of select elite, nevertheless represent a step forward, as call-in programmes show. It may be necessary, though, to determine how increasing popular participation in media programmes impact on government policies and programmes and responsiveness to consumer concerns.

Another noticeable development is the rapid subscription of media to the logic of the information superhighway. This is supposed to democratise the communication process in society further, but is constrained not only by economics but its still largely exclusive character as well as the often understated impact deriving therefrom and their implication for relevant development. Endemic poverty in society could only further alienate the mass of the people and exclude them from a communication process in which they are not supposed to be active players but

only net beneficiaries of outcomes. Increased evidence of internet use in urban centres and the introduction and growing popularity of the Global Systems of Mobile telecommunications (GSM), while representing major gains in the democratisation of the information space, are better appreciated in terms of their potential for re-ordering current patterns in development communication.

Considerable progress has been recorded since the promulgation of Decree 75 of 1992 establishing the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) to facilitate private sector participation in telecommunications service delivery, promote fair competition, set performance standards and regulate the provision of telecommunications facilities and services (Aluko, 2003: 65). In a projection by industry analysts at the early phase of GSM services in Nigeria. BMI-Techknowledge (2001) Africa, had in an internet article, stated:

*Cellular services market penetration is forecast to reach a level surpassing five subscribers per 100 people by the year 2010 – an equivalent to some 9 million subscribers, with roughly 60 & 40% split between rural and urban areas. Analysts further predict 30–35 million users of telecommunications services by 2005, and supply of services trailing demand.*

Globacom has been licensed as the second national carrier, since 1963 when Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (NITEL) became a monopoly. Aluko (2003: 64) states that NCC issued four mobile wireless licenses, most of them in February 2001, 22 fixed wireless licenses were issued in July 2002, while by 2003, the number of landlines and mobiles had risen to about three million. This increase was achieved mostly between 2001 and 2003. The signing of the Telecommunications Act in July 2003 repeals Decree 75 of 1992. The new Act seeks the creation and provision of a “regulatory framework for the Nigerian Communications industry”. These all point to the further democratisation of the telecommunications space.

Based on the pre and post-independence scenario, and given the logic of globalisation, it is increasingly likely that civil rule and the clamour for democratic reforms would lead to more mobilisation programmes to facilitate government by the people. In the unfolding era of minimum government and greater freedom of expression backed by technology, the development arena is likely to admit more participants. The “Us” versus “They” complex which has over the years positioned government and the people on different sides should hopefully give way to a new orientation which allows people to see themselves as very much part of the initiatives to improve their lot. The expectation is that such initiatives would be increasingly people-centred and focused. The top-down model of information dissemination would be replaced by a more participatory model.

Some current intervention programmes in health are proving the need for such approaches because of the relative success rates they have achieved. Such programmes, including those on family planning, adolescent sexuality, immunisation, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and Acquired Immune Deficiency

Syndrome (AIDS), have involved jointly and/or severally, varying degrees of participation by governments at different levels, local and international agencies and non-governmental organisations.

Such participation flow from the logic of the acknowledged relationship between politics and the development process. As Dissayanake (2000: 48) paraphrasing Rule states:

*There can be no formulation of a social problem that does not involve any political judgements and that there cannot be any solutions to such problems devoid of partisan interests...to pretend otherwise merely paves the way for the introduction of partisan measures and objectives in the guise of non-political technocratic problem-solving.*

The interpretation of this reality by governments in Nigeria has resulted in various interventions by it in the development process, as initiators of or collaborators in specific projects. The activities of some agencies, midwifed by government, have come under scrutiny in this regard, as they provide a platform for some analysis.

One of them is the Petroleum (Special) Trust Fund (PTF) which was established by Decree 25 of 1994 (amended by Decree 1 of 1995) by the military administration of the late General Sani Abacha, to utilise a percentage of revenue deriving from the increase in the pump price of petroleum products in October 1994. The PTF was mandated to rehabilitate public infrastructure and undertake other interventions in areas like health, education, food and water supply and security services.

General Muhammadu Buhari, a former head of state noted for being a disciplinarian while in office, was appointed to head the agency. This decision was interpreted as an attempt to shore up the credibility of PTF. However, and in spite of noticeable achievements, the agency was enmeshed in controversies deriving from its political character and antecedents.

According to Agbi (1996:6,40), by March 1999, the PTF had spent N198 billion on various projects in the country. Although it was a parallel and extra-constitutional agency which existed alongside ministries and parastatals originally charged with its mandate, the PTF's intervention in health, which was Agbi's research focus, was found to have been well received by patients and health personnel in Lagos State.

The achievements of the fund were highlighted by the Abacha administration as evidence of its progressive credentials and responsiveness to the yearning of the people for development. But as Agbi also found in her study, the PTF which by the grassroots character of its mandate was supposed to be communication-dependent, often was top-down in defining priorities and executing projects. One of the findings of this Lagos State Primary Health Care study was that there were no consultations with health personnel before drugs were supplied, with the consequence that "most of the drugs PTF supplied were not relevant to patients' needs" (Agbi, 1999:40). This pattern was typical nationally.

It was in the midst of controversies, amidst references to the PTF's success stories, that the Olusegun Obasanjo administration scrapped it after assuming office in 1999. The PTF example, like most development projects in the developing world, while showing the difference that the investment of resources could make to infrastructural development, brings to the fore, the need to operationalise the concept of participation and its meaningfulness within a convoluted development process. Braun (2003:188) captures the core of the dilemma thus:

*Participation is 'in' and threatens to deteriorate into a meaningless buzzword...The reduction of participation to socio-technical methods resulted in – put in polemical terms – the people being instrumentalized, and proved in the main to be a developmental dead-end street. It appeared (no differently than in earlier projects without participation) to promote a 'recipient mentality', distorted the optimal allocation of resources and destroyed tried and tested social organisation patterns without replacing them with functional equivalents.*

Apart from providing a basis for further analyses of the relationship between politics, communication and development, the PTF model suggests the need for more transparency in popular participation, and a de-politicisation of the structures of development as well as a clearer acceptance, commitment to, and demonstration of, the logic of development communication.

## **Conclusion**

The foregoing imply the need for precautionary and pro-active measures in the interaction between the communication and development process. There is the need to keep the overall development objective in focus so that communication and its role in national development do not translate to an uncontrolled and uncontrollable scenario of discordant voices which inevitably detract from the goals they were originally meant to achieve.

It is clear that communication, in spite of constraints rooted in orientations in society, have played key roles in national development in Nigeria. However, such contributions have never really been optimised because of structures in society and problems like poverty, which are cogs in the wheel. The question of what constitutes participation in the development process needs clarification.

While a dominant player like government has undertaken a number of development initiatives, its role in the overall process has often been misunderstood, sometimes acknowledged and at other times, appreciated. Government initiatives like the PTF, often a basis for assessing not only how government can capitalise on an initiative to score points, also illustrates how players in the process of development can better demonstrate an understanding of the close relationship between communication and national development.

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