

TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria as a nation has been faced with several development challenges - extreme poverty, illiteracy, poor health management, corruption, high unemployment rate, low infrastructural developments etc. which requires intensive communication efforts to overcome. Most development programmes meant for rural communities often fail due to non-participation of local people. Hence, this paper believes that the use of Traditional Institutions and Development Communication May reverse this trend as this will bring about participation of those for whom development is meant. Participatory Model of Development was adopted as the theoretical framework of this paper. It was observed that most development communication programmes often witness setbacks due to wrong approaches applied by program planners and non-involvement of traditional institutions highly respected in these societies. Thus, it is recommended that traditional institutions be integrated from the conceptualization down to planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages of development programmes, to facilitate the actualization of set objectives. More so, African indigenous media should be used along with modern media channels to compliment ongoing efforts in societal development.

Keywords: Development, development communication, traditional institution, rural development, Participation

Introduction

Development Communication was born out of the need to ameliorate the development challenges facing third world countries (mostly African countries). These challenges cut across illiteracy, ignorance, poverty, poor health management, superstitious beliefs, unwholesome cultural practices, lack of infrastructural developments, natural disasters etc. Development communication here is concerned with the facilitation of development-oriented information that can bring about positive changes and improve the quality of life of a people. Where development projects do not transform the people and improve on their quality of life, such is not worthy to be called development in this context.

Development communication is primarily concern with rural development problems, but is also covers urban problems (Kumar, 2011). Governments and non-governmental organizations have in time past and present made several efforts in order to attract development projects to the rural populace using different communication strategies to provide adequate information, awareness and mobilize the people positively toward the achievement of desired goals and objectives. Achieving this is not without the collective efforts and cooperation of the target population for whom these projects were meant for (Ineji, 2012). According to Diouf (1994), development programmes can only realize their full potential if the targeted audience are motivated and committed towards achieving its success. Unless the target social system themselves are the driving force of their own development, government and international agencies efforts may amount to a total futility.

Without the cooperation of the people, no amount of investment or provision of technology and inputs will bring about any lasting solution that can improve the living standards of the people.

It is generally accepted among scholars that communication plays a crucial role (if not an indispensable one at that), in the development and transformation of our traditional societies. Schramm (1964) is considered the first scholar to identify the role of communication and the mass media development processes. Communication here empowers the people with the required information, influence and mobilizes them towards healthy decision making that can transform the society and enhance their quality of live. Gupta (2015) pointed out that communication is use to promotes dialogue between communities and decision makers at local, national and regional levels. It can help promote, develop and implement developmental policies and programmes.

Development communication plays a crucial role in rural development. It amplifies voice, facilitate meaningful participation, and foster social changes in the society. It also creates the needed enabling environment for government officials and development agents to know the problems of the people by listening to them and learning from their own suggested solution to their problem, then, encourages the target social system to collectively develop the spirit of participation, motivation and commitment towards a developmental program. Local participation here is the democratization of information and development-oriented activities. (Narula & Pearce, 1986 cited in Moemeka, 2000).

Development communication enables the planners of a development project to identify and formulate programmes concept by consulting with the people in order to take into account their own needs, attitudes and intelligence. Only with communication will the project beneficiaries become the principal actors to make development programmes successful (Diouf, 1994).

However, despite the emphasis on rural participation by communication scholars, it as been observed that traditional institutions are often ignored or not consulted in the planning and implementation of development communication programmes. Traditional institution here, according to Crook (2005) are all those forms of social and political authority which have long existed and serve the society as source of power and authority before the advent of colonialism in Nigeria. Peter (2014) added that it is an “indigenous political arrangements whereby leaders with proven track records are appointed and installed in line with their native laws and custom to act as custodian of their people's norms, cultures and practices” (p. 135).Yadava and Gautam (1980) insisted that development communicators must try to ensure that traditional institutions are being utilized to effectively communicate development issues in order to influence attitudinal and behavioural changes needed for societal growth and developments.

This paper therefore, explores the role of traditional institutions in the development communication processes in Nigeria, with a view to highlights some of it importance in bring about effective grass-root mobilization and development.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted the Participatory Model of Development to drive it theoretical framework. This model was proposed by Paulo Freire and Boala Augusto in the 1970s. The model according to Anaeto and Solo-Anaeto (2010) identified participation of the target social system as the key to effective rural development. The model posits that the common people are also intelligent in their own ways to bring about solutions to their problems and as such, they must be involved in the planning, implementation of development programmes. Participation of the local people (traditional institutions inclusive) will make easier and simpler the sharing of relevant information, knowledge, trust, commitment and encourage a right attitude in planning and implementation of development programmes geared towards the transformation of the society. Thus communication and the media play the role of creating awareness and consciousness of the people towards societal development.

The Concepts of Development and Development Communication

The concept of development has been subjected to several definitions. There is at present, no unanimity of opinion among scholars as to what constitute development, as such, there is no universally acceptable definition to the concept proposed by Edame (2005) defined development as a progression from a lower and often undesirable state of things to a high and preferred one. Such a progression requires that a correct characterization of the higher state be available. It is only then that one can search for the best strategies of reaching the highest state. According to this author, development is “a continuous process involving structural transformation of the society” (p. 6).

Anaeto (2010) posited that “development is the total process of growth and improvement which involves growth in economic, social, political and cultural sectors of the society”. Rogers (1976) in Wilson (2005) considered development to be “a widely participatory process of social change in a society, intended to bring about social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities) for the majority of the people through their gaining greater control over their environment” (p. 124). Soola (2003) in Anaeto (2010, p.5) added that development is that which is:

of the people and for the people. It must permeate the entire spectrum and strata of society, touching on the lives of the poorest of the poor, lifting them up, as it were, from the abyss of poverty, ignorance, disease, squalor, human rights abuses and

similar deprivation”.

Moemeka (2000) buttressed the concept of development when he explained it to be “a positive change (for the better) from conditions (social, economic, political, cultural and human) that are no longer considered good enough for the goals and aspirations of a society to those that are mostly likely to meet those goals and aspirations” (p. 7).

This paper considers the concept of development as the process of transformation and acquisition of positive change (s) that is geared towards general improvement of the society and the quality of life of the people.

Development communication on the other hand involves the use of communication strategies to support developmental projects. It is targeted towards achieving positive changes that will lead to the transformation of the society. Through development communication one can facilitate speedy change in behaviour, attitude and practices considered undesirable for developing societies.

According to Imoh (2013), development communication was first introduced as an integral part of rural development and transformation in Africa since the 1950s and 1960s to promote and facilitate the participation of the rural poor in the sharing of the benefits of development as well as the responsibility for development decision making. The 2006 World Congress on Communication for Development defined development communication as a “social process based on dialogue using a broad range of tools and methods. It is also about seeking change at different levels including listening, building trust, sharing knowledge and skills, building policies, debating and learning for sustained and meaningful change” (FAO, 2006, n.p).

Development communication is seen as a “holistic communication effort, approach or action designed to mobilize a people towards active participation in programmes aimed at achieving improved physical, socio-cultural, political and economic environments for the benefit of man in society” (Nwodu, 2007, p. 18).

Approaches of Development Communication

According to FAO (2006) cited in Imoh (2013, pp. 15-16), communication approaches usually comes as an afterthought in most development program in rural Africa. Program planners often follow uni-sectoral instead of the multi-sectoral and integrated approaches. In the time past, several development communication approaches have been used to communicate rural development programmes. These include: the diffusionist model, advocacy, Programmatization and Engagement approaches.

Diffusionist Approach: This model was predicated on the idea of Everett Rogers in his Diffusion of Innovation theory. This approach was grossly deficient and criticized due to it one way flow of development-oriented information from the experts who see themselves as all knowing, placing the rural people only at the receiving end. The rural people do not take part in the conceptualization to the implementation and evaluation of the development communication program meant for them.

Programmatization Approach: By this, we mean the usual practices in developing societies where succeeding governments prefer to introduce another program to it people abandoning the previous ones, without making any efforts to make the previous program work.

Advocacy Approach: This has to do with the employment of communication processes to bring about rural development. Here, the development communication experts still exert superior knowledge but does that without working with the help of policy makers and opinion leaders (traditional institutions, influential persons in the society etc). The inadequacies in the advocacy approach led to the agitation and introduction of the engagement approach.

Engagement Approach: This is the most widely accepted approach among development communication scholars in the developing societies. This has to do with consultation and integration of the local people (traditional institutions inclusive) in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the development communication processes. It begins with: Analysing the problem or developmental challenges of the people, definition of the problem and needs of the people, identifying alternative solutions to the problem, selection and implementation of the preferred solution and evaluation of the program.

Traditional Institutions in Nigeria

Traditional institutions have been identified by Yadava and Gautam (1980) to include: traditional rulers, kin-groups, farmers' forum, age groups, women clubs, sacred institution (church, temple,

mosque, etc) obtainable in the rural societies. However, in this paper, the phrase 'traditional institutions' will be limited to traditional rulers, clan heads, village heads and their council of elders as organized and recognized in all Nigerian communities.

Orji, & Olali (2010) cited in Nweke (2012) defined traditional institutions as “the indigenous political arrangements whereby leaders with proven track records are appointed and installed in line with the provisions of their native laws and customs... they are the custodians of their people's norms, cultures and practices” (p.206). To Omole (2016), traditional institutions referred to as:

those social, economic or political organizations/bodies which derive their power, legitimacy, influence and authority from the traditions of a particular people...In the pre-colonial Africa, the set of people who control, direct and superintend over traditional institutions are called traditional rulers and their subordinates like provincial chiefs, princes, ward heads, etc. Indeed, the power, authority and legitimacy of traditional rulers were derived from traditions.

In Nigeria, the heads of traditional institutions are called different names according to the language and culture of a particular community. Most communities in the Northern Nigeria which is predominantly made up of Hausa/Fulani people addressed heads of traditional institutions as 'Emirs' or 'Sultan' and their councils, depending on the ranking of the traditional rulers. In western Nigeria, (the Yorubas), there are popularly known as the 'Obas'. While the traditional rulers among the 'Igbos' who occupy the South-eastern Nigeria are called the 'Igwe' or 'Eze'. Most states in the south-south region do not have a generally known name for their traditional rulers, each state or communities have a particular name they call theirs. Popular among them are: Obong of Calabar, Jaja of Opopo, etc. However, there exists clan heads and paramount rulers in these areas certificated by the government to maintain peaceful co-existence among the people.

The traditional institution elicit greater confidence and legitimacy in the eyes of the ordinary Nigerians than the institution of the modern state due to its closeness to the people. Government comes and goes but the traditional institution has remained an integral framework of the people's history and the bedrock of the traditional society. The government and non-governmental agencies must work harmoniously with traditional institutions to bring about meaningful development because these institutions have remained the pulse of the people and an enduring part of their cultural heritage. It is important to note that no society progresses without well defined cultural norms and values which regulate the activities of its people (Thewill, 2016).

Traditional institutions are deeply rooted and unique to members of a particular community. They have the capacity to influence and control the behaviour of the people. They have the powers to coordinate information regarding any issue from their various clan heads or emirs and this information were processed to avail peaceful co-existence and mutual love for one another in their respective domains (Thewill, 2016).

Role of Traditional Institution in Development Communication Campaigns

Development communication campaign is explained in Anaeto and Solo-Anaeto (2010) as a short term program that is centred on development issues designed purposively to inform, create awareness, elicits behaviour changes, attitude and practices through the use of variety of available media to the benefit of the target social system. According to Omole (2016), the inability of Nigeria as a country to achieve most sustainable development programmes can be attributed to failure to integrate the traditional institutions in their development programmes. Grassroots mobilization is made possible and easier through the help of traditional institutions in the periphery where these development challenges are being experienced (Nsude & Isika, 2016).

The traditional institutions had long before the advent of colonialism in traditional African societies “had well organized and well established systems of administration where public order was provided and maintained; where laws were made and implemented; where inter-communal and intertribal conflicts were settled” (Osakede & Ijimakinwa, 2015, p. 33). Traditional institutions have been significant features of the people and had also command a high degree of loyalty and respect among them. Chief Mike Ozekhome a renowned senior advocate of Nigeria (SAN) and human activist could not hesitate to admit that the secret behind any meaningful development success in the country is its traditional institutions. According to him, they are the bedrock of a typical Nigerian society without which the nation's cherished and value system would have crumbled (Vanguard, November, 18, 2018).

The traditional institutions are considered unique to African society because it is seen as the

simplest form of governance and the closest to the people. Members of traditional societies enjoy unlimited and direct access to them. More importantly here, is the fact that traditional institutions maintain a transparent and participatory method of resolving dispute and collectively making decisions that could foster societal growth and development. Community resources (people, knowledge, land, things and money) are effectively utilized to meet the social, cultural and economic needs of the people (The pointer, 2017).

The import of Development communication according to Moemeka (2000, p.14) is the direction of communication strategies in order to create understanding and interaction among the people of target social system:

It attempts to create a conducive atmosphere for genuine dialogue that would ensure that the members of the benefiting social system understand the rationale for the development programmes, accept the need for change and fully participate in the planning and execution of development programmes. This means that development communication is audience-oriented. The emphasis is not so much on getting development agents to reach their goals, but rather creating a conducive environment that would enable the target social system to understand, appreciate, be actively involved in the development efforts and be committed to the achievement of goals that are relevant within the system.

Development communication programmes often witness low acceptance among the targeted social system due to lack of rural participation, inadequate information and education thereby “making them ignorant, apathetic, hostile and prejudiced towards any development project that is destined for them” (Obiora, 2011, p.126). In the views of Momeka (2000), “a true and authentic development effort takes into account the often-ignored fact that the social intelligence existing within the target social system which is often a more relevant and necessary possession than the abstract intelligence of the development agent” (p. 9).

The traditional institutions are well respected and feared in the community. They also serve as role models to their subjects in the community who look unto them for the instructions, guidance and advice on some developmental issues. Arguably, why some development communication interventions do not succeed or gain rural acceptance could be the failure on the part of most programme planners to utilise traditional institutions and local intelligence of the people in collectively identifying and suggesting possible solutions to the development challenges of the people. Most especially, development communication messages must be design in a way that reflects and respects the norms, values, traditions and customs held in high esteem by the target social system. This can be achieved by consulting with traditional institutions (most especially the paramount rulers, clan and village heads, councils of elders, etc) that are considered the custodians of the people belief systems and cultural heritage. They must be integrated from the conceptualization stage of the program to the end of it in the language the people could understand.

Obiora (2011) had insisted that:

any message designed for the rural populace that does not share the same frame of reference with the majority of the masses that constitute the target audience before, and for whom the messages are meant, will surely not meet the objective of the project/program as such gesture will amount to exercise in futility. This is because most government and development agencies carry out their projects or programmes at the rural areas with the belief that they understand the villagers very well to be poor and therefore, have no choice, that whatever they (villagers) are given is acceptable by them (p. 125).

Wilson in Ineji (2012) pointed out that development communication plays an important role in the five stages of the program: (1) awareness stage; (2) interest stage; (3) evaluation stage (4) trial state, and (5) the adoption stage of a developmental project. However, it is the view of this paper that development communication should work hand in gloves with existing traditional institutions in all the aforementioned stages to achieve maximum cooperation of the people and mobilise them towards the desired change.

According to Moemeka (2000), the participation of the target social system is sacrosanct in the development communication processes. It helps in developing a positive attitude and social changes without which physical and mental development of the people could be practically impossible. Imoh

(2013) added that in planning for rural development the development communicator must endeavour to move the people from being mere receptive objects to active participants, he must also understand how the target social system perceive the development programmes, their worries, the personal obstacles and actions the people take to cope with, succumb to or overcome them (p.16).

It is worthy of mention here that previous approaches like diffusion of innovation, programmatisation and advocacy have failed due to its gross deficiency in meeting the needs of the people especially in developing countries. These previous approaches no longer have relevance in the development process. Therefore, the introduction of engagement approach to the development circle appears laudable and acceptable to most stakeholders involved in the development process. This is because the engagement approach is quite inclusive and does not undermine any in the development process.

Conclusion

Development communication is basically centred on the transformation of developing societies. Communication here is necessary to achieve maximum participation of the people, their collective understanding and advancing positive changes that could enhance their quality of life. It is the position of this paper that for any development projects to strife at the grass-root level, the role of traditional institution is an indispensable one. The must play a crucial part in the realization of the desired project. Development communication planners must consult elaborately, cooperate with them and integrate the traditional institutions fully in their programmes in other to attract speedy positive changes in behaviour, attitude and practices needed for rural development.

Most development communication interventions do not see the light of the day (fails) due to unwillingness on the part of programme planners to explore and utilized local intelligence of the target social system. They, programme planners see themselves as all knowing and consider the rural people as being ignorant and bereft of developmental ideologies. Hence, they tend to impose their foreign ideas on the people which are totally alien and averse to the peoples' already held values, norms, traditions, customs and mores. It is important to state here that addressing the unwholesome cultural practices and superstitious beliefs which militate against effective rural development is predetermined by the level of conviction on the part of the traditional institutions that are considered as the custodians of these values.

Recommendations

- Traditional institutions should be given due recognition in rural development programmes. They should form part and parcel of the program.
- Indigenous or Traditional media along with the modern mass media mix (trado-modern) should be utilized in all development communication programmes.
- Local languages and intelligence should be harnessed for effective rural development
- There should be adequate and proper education and sensitization programmes aimed at creating awareness and mobilizing the rural people towards development programmes.
- Government and programme planners must integrate the traditional institution and their indigenous communication system from the conceptualization stage down to evaluation stage of the development communication program.

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