Integrating Development Communication into Traditional Postulations for Social Change in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper took a holistic view of traditional institutions in relation to development communication in the African continent and Nigeria. It contends that there is a symbiotic relationship between communication and development. For the success of every development communication programmes a close working relationship between development and policy makers is crucial and recommends a careful selection and integration of the modern media of communication with traditional media systems. And, also adoption of Social and Behaviour Change Communication strategy that encourages the use of traditional and modern communication approach in National Development is beneficial.

Key Words: Traditional Institutions, Development, Communication, Integration, Social Change

Introduction

An exhaustive discourse of development communication in the African context cannot exclude traditional institutions which arc sine qua non for development. This is because traditional institutions are part and parcel of the people's daily existence.

Traditional institutions include, veritable institutions such as the traditional rulers, local associations such as Women groups, youth groups and association, age-grades, market places, council of Elders, town criers etc. Traditional institutions in Africa play vital role in development communication and both are fused together and cannot be separated from one another. This paper takes a holistic look at the relationship between traditional institutions and development communication as it affects the entire concept of development.

Conceptual Clarification

It is pertinent to understand some basic concepts that relate to this paper so as to have a proper understanding of their application.

Development Communication

Development Communication or Communication for Development formerly known as Development Support Communication (DSC) is concerned with communicating the development message and can be defined as "the use of all forms of communication in the reportage, publishing and promotion of development at all levels of a society (Edeani, 1993). Citing Quebral (1985), Okunna (2001. p.293) says: "Development can also be defined as the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of the people.

Development communication is equated with participation. Reporting the view, of Ekwelie (1997), Okunna (2002, p.293). Explains that a remarkable feature of development communication is that:

> It is only concerned with peoples welfare as defined by them...
> development communication is news from below as against news from
> above... that is news packaged by those who believed they know what we
> need.

A narrow view of development communication will see development journalism which is the use of mass media in the promotion of development while a broader view see development communication as the use of all forms of communication in the development process. This implies, the use of the mass

media and interpersonal, traditional, group and community media and other traditional institutions in the promotion of development programmes. Wilson (1917. p. 84-85) says:

> Development communication is relating media practice to the needs of development through news, features, cartoons, deliberate campaigns like mass literacy, health, public enlightenment electoral processes, agriculture, rural banking, including national security and other rural or National development goals.

Wilson further explains that "it is a brand of journalism practice", positively oriented towards the solution towards the solution of the educational, socio-economic, political and other problems of the polity.

This paper shares the same view with a broader conception of development communication as the use of all forms of communication, interpersonal communication and traditional institutions in the promotion of development programmes. This is the thrust of this paper.

Traditional Institutions

Traditional institutions in the context of this paper refers to institutional channels that exist in the African setting which are embedded and tus.cd into communication related events. They include the town crier, the traditional rulers, women and youths associations, age grades, council of elders etc. In the African setting, traditional institutions are not isolated from communication. To some extent, traditional institutions arc traditional communication or indigenous media. Indigenous media system is an all-embracing concept which incorporates the entire existence of the people. Wilson (1990, p.280), shares this view when he states that:

> What constitutes traditional communication is today a hybrid from other fields of study namely, anthropology, history, sociology, linguistics, music, religion, mythology and an amalgam of multi-cultural practices, which have become standard.

Institutions

An institution is a regular and firm way of getting things done in an area of elite. In this connection, institution is understood to mean all social conventions and practices that exist in the African setting, especially those that are communication related. These include traditional institutions, communication instruments, beliefs, etc., that govern the wayand lives of the African.

Traditional Institutions in Akru A

As earlier stated, what constitutes traditional institutions is a conglomerate of many social institutions in the African setting comprising traditional institutions, people's social conventions and practices, beliefs) stems, market places, village square, town-crier etc.

This paper shall attempt to enumerate and highlight the functions of some of these indigenous or traditional institutions in the development aspirations of the people:

a. **Town crier:** the town crier is variously called village gong-man, the village announcer or even the chief messenger or palace liaison officer. The town-crier is one of most pervasive of the traditional channels in the African setting. He occupies a unique position and he is readily accessible to the village chief for routine information diffusion. As pail of his routine duties, he disseminates messages on development programmes such as health, politics, agriculture, and similar development programmes of the people. This includes: labour, market and road construction etc.

b. **The village head:** The village head exercises enormous powers and is responsible for the enforcement of laws. He is also regarded as the custodian of the traditions and customs of the

people and symbol of government authorities. As agent of government, he could also assist in the collection of taxes, mobilize the people towards development programmes such as health, (vaccinations),   politics (voters registration and voting, in elections) and enforcement of government policies and programmes. In addition to these functions, he also acts as agent of information dissemination. Hence, there can be no development in the community without input from the traditional rulers in contemporary society in Africa. These are held in high esteem and their views are highly sought in matters of development.

c.   **Market places:** Market places apart from serving as business and commercial centers also serve as communication forums. Market places are diffusion forums of social interactions and exchange. They can gainfully be employed for the diffusion of developmental communication messages. According to Jefkins and Ulgboajah (I486), the market place remains effective because of the tremendous amount of interaction it generates.   It serves various purposes to the village economic, social, political, cultural, religious and psychological spheres. As news centers, the market place attracts personal as well as public information on subjects such as public affairs, family affairs, educational matters and religious concerns mostly at rural and village level. Market place associations serve as sub-forums for economic co-operation and social communication which can be harnessed for development communication.

d.   **Village Chief/Elder:** Traditional chiefs and elders exercise enormous powers in the day to day existence of the people. They are regarded as custodians of traditions of the people and symbols of government authorities and play a crucial role in the enforcement of communication decisions in communication or indigenous media. Indigenous media system is involved in development issues. The elders are perceived as embodiments of wisdom, fairness, legend, history and tradition who were in constant communication with the ancestors. They were revered and decisions made by them were regarded as oracular pronouncements. The council of elders and council of chiefs who constitute the village council carry out   both adjudication and communication function for the overall development of the community).

e.   **Age-grades:** These age-grades constitute a veritable political and communication structure in the African rural communities. (June apart, serving .is a proper organ of socialization into a matured and recognized society. it also contributes to political stability, social cohesion and moral soundness of the society by ensuring that its laws and regulations were observed. Apart from being responsible for the maintenance of public roads, works, cleaning sources of drinking water and providing manual communal labour, the age-grades are veritable channels for mobilization and dissemination of development messages.

f.   **Local associations:** These include women groups, youth groups, clubs etc. these groups exert influence in the spiritual, emotional, social and health problems of the entire community and social control. They constitute veritable media of information dissemination in the rural setting and can be easily harnessed as agents of mobilization for the accomplishment of community development task which goes beyond communication.   These   groups   also   include   the umbrella term "Local Leaders".

Characteristics/Uniqueness of Indigenous Media

Certain features or characteristics which are unique are common TO traditional media of communication. These characteristics constitute their identifiable trademarks which are based on their nature, setting and function. These characteristics as listed by Wilson (1997, p.98-100) include the fact that they are authoritative, credible, transactional, integrative, non-alienating, adaptable, definitive, customary, ubiquitous, low-cost, popular and acceptable. Traditional media are unique in several ways and include the fact that they exhibit the following traits:

Traditional: Oramedia are traditionally based as they are transmitted from one generation to the other.

Language: Traditional media employ the local language of the people which makes them more appealing and effective.

Alternative media: The indigenous media provide an alternative means of communication and give the local people opportunity to participate in communication without stress. Messages from the mass media are relaxed to the local people through interpersonal means using opinion leaders etc.

Culture: indigenous media are derived from the culture of the people which makes the people have faith in the system.

Less expensive: Traditional media are cheap and less expensive than the modern mass media. This makes them readily accessible for use almost at no cost. One does not need to pay money to listen to the voice of the town-crier while passing vital information across to the local people.

Communal: Oramedia are communal in nature because they are used within the confines and understanding of a particular group of people. The communal nature makes them more enduring.

Traditional media are generally credible, simple to use and understand. Other characteristics of traditional media that endear them to the people are:

Reach: African media system is ubiquitous because the channels can reach main rural people wherever they are found. This makes the traditional media amenable from messages that are out of the reach of the modern mass media.

Channel credibility: A message which source is questionable has no place or chance of being perceived appropriately by the audience. Messages transmitted by impersonal and anonymous source such as the modern mass media are often greeted with hostility and skepticism unlike the indigenous media which are familiar to the rural audience. This gives the message credibility and acceptability.

Channel of change: It has been proved by researchers that the diffusion of innovations is more readily accomplished through informal and interpersonal contacts in persuading people to adopt innovations. This gives credence to the mass media as being more effective in creating awareness and knowledge, whereas indigenous or interpersonal media arc channels of change. This makes the traditional media more easily adoptable for the collections and dissemination of development information.

Challenges of Indigenous Media

Like any other system, traditional media are not perfect in their operations. Wilson (1999. p.104) in advancing reasons for their usage and patronage equally presents their shortcomings which make a review of the entire system imperative. These shortcomings or challenges include:

a. **Technological deficiencies:** The fast pace of modern development makes it imperative that the system must move faster than before.

b. **Urbanization:** The system is limited by the challenges of urbanization with its attendant consequences. The adoption of Christianity and Islam as modes of worship has displaced the traditional mode of worship and this has reduced patronage of extra-mundane communication at both private and public functions.

c. **Cultural diversity:** Which has given rise to multiplicity of languages are a bane and an impediment to indigenous media. This accounts for diversity of African political systems, values, norms and beliefs. This has posed a serious challenge to communication scholars in terms of formulation of a National policy on indigenous media.

d. **Languages:** Another challenge is extinction of indigenous African languages. Adoption of English, French, Spanish and other foreign languages as official language has almost put some African languages in danger of going into extinction. Western culture has dominated the African environment and this has undermined African value system – family set up, community and institutions.

e. The erosion of African value system in various homes in Africa also threatens oramedia. Lack of pride in African tradition and values among the ne\v generation of African children is a serious challenge to the African media system and Africa in general.

The general thinking however, is that, the best way to sustain indigenous media in Africa is to selectively adopt and combine certain aspects of indigenous media which are useful with the modern mass media for the overall developmental aspirations of the developing Nations.

Developmental Functions of Traditional Institutions in Nigeria

Traditional institutions perform very crucial functions in African communities. Although this paper has attempted to discuss individual traditional institutions/and contributions to development in general terms.

Traditional institutions or traditional communication systems perform social functions for the society. Wilson (2004, pp. 35 – 36) lists them to include mobilization, education, enlightenment, entertainment, information, intra and inter-cultural purposes.

Whereas the mass media are effective and efficient in terms of bringing awareness and knowledge, traditional media are more effective in enforcement. This has to do with the closeness of traditional media to the people and the fact that they are followed by sanctions. Hence, this quality gives traditional media an edge over the mass media and makes them amenable for development related purposes.

Traditional media also perform very crucial functions in the cultural, political and health education of the African people. Their effectiveness in these areas stems from their grassroots orientation and the fact that they are part and parcel of the people's way of life. They serve as surveyors of the people's cultural and political way of life.

It is pertinent to emphasize that, the emergence and wide use of the mass media have not displaced nor taken the place of the traditional institutions or media in development process. This has engendered the clamour for integration of the traditional institution which are powerful traditional media tools in publicizing and prompting social development programmes.

In Nigeria, traditional institutions can play the following development functions according to Nwodu and Nkozor (2003, p. 65).

i. Publicizing grassroots support for active participation in developmental project.
ii. Aiding innovation diffusion and adaptation as a people, especial!) as rural dwellers tend to accord greater credibility to information reaching them through such media.
iii. They serve as potent source of socio-cultural health and politic! Transmission and adaptation tools that help the people to attain point of self-actualization and integrate into the ideas of national development and identity.
iv. Provide education on the norms and morals of their society to curb dysfunctional attitudes towards developmental policies that affect them.
v. Provide useful information cum reports, announcement and directives needed for the upward mobility of people in the rural areas.
vi. Promoting good relationship among neighboring communities by encouraging communal/intercultural relationship and understanding. Wilson observed that, yam festivals in various pails of Nigeria are all large traditional communication set up which bring about cultural and even mass communication.

MacBride *et al.* (1980) notes that, traditional institutions use subtle form of persuasion by presenting the required message in locally popular artistic forms and which cannot be rivaled b\ any other means of communication. They averred that, instance abound where songs, dance, groups and the like are used to promote campaigns against social vices, or for advances in farming, health, agricultural reforms, national integration and similar national goals.

Traditional institutions can be used to dispel superstitions, archaic perceptions and unscientific attitudes that the people have inherited from tradition which lend difficult to modify.
Like the mass media which perform informational role for the urban dwellers, traditional media are the chief means of information on a wide range of issues dear to the lives of the people. The information may border on development programmes, such as information on immunization of children, voters registration, agricultural extension services etc.

Through intra-cultural and other communication related activities a high of integration is achieved. Also, pertinent is that through visits and festivities which abound in the African setting, group

cohesion, social and communal solidarity is achieved. By this, a conducive atmosphere is created for development to be achieved.

The beauty and effective uses of indigenous means of communication cannot be over emphasized. In this vein, Osho (2010,p. 147) remarks that:

> All the means of communication originated from the earliest Africans in the old Egypt... these essentially make them highly effective and enduring in the dissemination of information personally, inter-personally and through group communication.

One unique thing about traditional institutions is immediate feedback, which makes communication to be effective and this advantage is essential for participatory development. Also, important is that, oramedia is culturally biased as it is natural and it is the tradition and custom of the people. It involves- their language, dialect, individual occupation, family occupation or communal occupation.

Challenges of Development Communication in Nigeria

The challenge of development communication will be better appreciated if the concept of development communication is properly understood within the context of systematic utilization of appropriate communication channels and technique to increase people's participation in development and to inform, motivate and train rural population mainly at the grassroots level.

Appropriate choice of communication channels/media will require careful selection criteria, based on the strength and weaknesses of the media. Unfortunately, this is not always the case with development communication campaigns in Nigeria.

Neglect of the communication principles has resulted in the failure of many development communications to include, essentially, alienation of the audience. Wrong approach by development communication campaign planner and implementers has often posed a problem to the realization of the goals of development communication. This is mostly manifest in poor message design.

Other factors according to Egbon (2010).militating against the set goals of previous attempt at development communication using the mass media include:

i. **Source orientation bias:** Which implies that, the authority knows what is best and what change to introduce to the people. Many instances abound whereby, the change or innovations selected are imposed, were either irrelevant or ill adapted to the people's cognition and material resources. Whereas, the people need only, the style of development that is in consonance with their goals and aspirations. Many of such innovations introduced in the rural areas were not only ill advised but also negative to the local environment and the real needs of the people. What they fail to know is that, despite the need for economic growth and change, the people invoked may not want the disruption that will come with change.

ii. **Message construction bias:** the nature and construction of the development message require a careful attention in order for the communication to go down well with recipients. But, unfortunately, such messages are disseminated and diffused on mass basis pre-supposing literacy which is a problem in the rural hinterlands where majority of those needing innovations dwell. Consequently, the message flows top down to the people who need change instead of bottom to the top where the target audience can be active participants in decision making of what best suit its growth and quality of life. Egbon stales that, in order to bridge the communication gap that trails a top-bottom communication initiative and also, create opportunities tor such dialogue that would lead to a clear understanding of the issues involved in developmental initiatives, the message content must be appropriately explained within the cultural and environmental setting of the people involved. This is one reason why modern approaches to development now stress a

blending of the old traditional communication methods with the modern mass media to ensure better communication fidelity at the local level.

iii. **The cultural bias:** Another reason why development strategies continue to fail in Africa is the fact that logic is based and interpreted in strict western terms. This ethnocentric bias, makes development goals far removed from the reality of the economic and cultural dynamics of traditional systems in Africa. I hey do not create room to accommodate the traditional African mode of economic development.

As a matter of fact, any development strategy that will be successful can only emanate from culturally sensitive communication process which involves the marriage of both traditional and modern theory. MacBride commission acknowledged the validity of traditional institutions especially when there is need to influence attitudes, instigate action and promote change in any community.

Strategic Approach to Integrating Traditional Institution/Communication in Development Communication

This is a disciplined effort at generating fundamental decisions and actions that will shape and guide the direction of any development initiative or programme using Social and Behavior Change Communication Strategies.

Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) is; research driven, evidence-based, communication processes that draw on socio-ecological model using behavior change communication, social mobilization and advocacy at the individual, community and national/societal levels respectively.

SBCC is a contemporary strategic approach in communication for development used by development agencies such as FH1360, UNICEF, USAID and some African countries lo drive development programmes.

SBCC propagates Trado-Modern approach/communication to developmental issue or initiatives. It strongly averred that, for effective and result oriented development programme, it is important to know how to effectively reach particular target populations and help achieve particular goals.

Each medium, be it mass media or traditional media, has its advantages and disadvantages, the one best suited to particular circumstances can then be adopted. Modern media/mass media can raise awareness of specific facts because they are assumed to carry a certain authority and reliability but later on in the process, target populations/communities appear less interested in mass media authority than they are in the opinions and behaviors of people to whom they feel close to. Therefore, interpersonal while the mass media play a supporting role in development issues; mass media is now means to an end and not an end to a means.

This is the edge that, traditional institution/communication have over other forms of communication dissemination. In planning and implementation of development, SBCC uses the C-change model which guides the process effectively. C-change model entails the followings:

i. Understanding the situation/formative research: helps to identify the target population, the project objectives and goals.
ii. Focusing and design of communication messages.
iii. Creating
iv. Implementation and monitoring.
v. Evaluation and re-planning.

SBCC suggests the use of media/channels mix in information dissemination and uses the socio-economic model in solving and proffering solutions to problems and as such, uses the following media/channel mix at the three levels of change; the individual, community and the societal levels.

Example of Media/Channel Mix at the Three Levels of Chance:

i. **Individual level:** (uses behavior change communication for the most affected by the problem)
    Media Mix: Interpersonal communication by community traditional leaders, change agents, resource persons, community, radio and television and posters. Age grades, women organizations, town criers etc.

ii. **Community level:** (uses social mobilization for service providers, partners and families) inter-personal communication by community/traditional leaders, change agents, resources persons, community radio, television and posters, age grades, women organization, town criers etc.

iii. **Societal level:** (uses advocacy for policy makers, church leaders. FBOs. NCOs, partners etc): radio and television jingles/spots, discussion guides, posters, leaflet, talking points, advocacy meetings and community dialogue.

The absence of pre-project research investigation by media planners, managers, policy makers and key communication officials does not put them in a vantage position to understand the frame of reference of the target audience. Another reason why development communication targeted at disadvantaged groups has continued to fail is because the information disseminated to such people is often irrelevant to their needs and worthy of note is that, the wrong choice communication medium or channel can also defeat the purpose of any development initiative.

Conclusion

This paper has taken a holistic view at traditional institution/communication in relation to development communication. The paper concludes that development and communication are inseparable which lays the blame for failure of most development communication campaign in rural community at the door steps of inadequate and improper planning by development campaigners and policy makers.

Recommendations

The paper recommends integration of the two major systems - traditional media and the modern media for dissemination of development information. This is because while the mass media are more effective for creating awareness and knowledge more rapidly, the traditional media are easily adaptable for the collections and dissemination of development communication information.

The paper also suggest the use of Social and Behaviour Change Communication strategies for a holistic, result-oriented, culturally-grounded and human sensitive communication approach that encourages the integration of both trado-modern system into development programmes in Nigeria.

Nigerian Government should incorporate the Trado-modern Communication approach into the Nations Communication policy to encourage its promulgation and sustainability in developmental programmes in the country.

Communication scholars should also conduct research and projects using trado-modern approach in order to find a better way for effective integration into communication processes geared towards National development. This behooves on all concerned to selectively adopt and combine certain aspects of traditional media which are useful with the modern mass media for the overall development of the people.

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