

APPLICATION OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION IN AFRICA'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT- NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT

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ABSTRACT: *Development communication was introduced as an integral part of rural development in Africa in 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 development communication system models derived essentially from dominant economic development theories of the west which emphasised information and persuasion, increases in production and consumption, technological innovation, high level of capital investment and the trickle down of benefits. The extensionist dependent, pro-urban, pro-liferate, pro-mass media, one way flow of influence oriented messages from development workers at the top to the rural peasantry at the bottom (otherwise known as top-down) encouraged source oriented, authoritarian, manipulative and persuasive communication that created dependent rather than collaborative relationships between the source and the receivers of development messages. This paper reviews the impact of development communication in Africa rural development and observes that most programmes did not achieve the desired goals. The paper therefore, calls for a bottom-up, horizontal and participatory communication approaches that actively involve the rural people in the conceptualisation of the problems, setting of objectives and designing of strategies and messages that are capable of reaching all and producing uniform comprehension and acceptance of development messages.*

KEYWORDS: Development, Communication, Dependency Relationships, Rural Communication in Africa.

INTRODUCTION

In Africa's rural communities, people have been brought up to work with their hands, without much need for formal education. Consequently, the cultivation of the mind, curiosity, contemplation and reasoning was relatively undeveloped and unjustified (Moris, 1981). Today's challenges in increasing income, improving maternal and child health, nutrition, reducing family size, enhancing adolescent health, preventing HIV-AIDS and controlling the environment has made information and education indispensable. In the past five decades, African governments and development agencies have recognized the value of communication for national development, most especially rural development.

Unfortunately, in many development programmes in rural Africa, communication is tagged on as an after thought with few resources and certainly without resources and the critical mass necessary to make a major impact on the beneficiary communities (FAO, 2006). Our Approach to communication for rural development has followed the unisectoral instead of the multisectoral and integrated approaches.

However, rural people do not see their problems in terms of separate components as presented by development planners, but rather, they see their reality as a simple continuum in which the elements are interrelated and integrated (FAO, 1987). Development communication to be effective, should take into account all the factors that determine or influence the living conditions or working conditions of rural families. In this context, the Millennium Development Goals may be difficult to achieve in the developing countries of Africa. First, the limits of what new development knowledge on its own can achieve are defined by factors such as poverty, illiteracy, poor housing, lack of basic services such as sanitation and clean water and social factors such as the low social and economic status of rural dwellers, who have historically been marginalized politically in the decision making process. These constraints which rural people have to live with, acting in conjunction with the near absence of communication channels, institutions and workers to convey vital development messages and services to remote rural communities have made it difficult to achieve the goals of development programmes targeting rural communities. The long-term perception of political, social and economic marginality of the rural population has led to diminishing levels of trust in societal institutions. As a result, many rural people are unwilling to seek help from the established community service and agencies which they perceive as branches of both central and regional governments. This widespread level of distrust and a long term cultural norm toward self reliance has therefore made the task of communication for rural development an almost impossible task. While planning for rural development; development communities must therefore endeavour to move the people from being receptive objects to active objects (Galtung 1980). Development communicators must understand how the rural people (beneficiaries) perceive the programmes, the problems they face, the personal obstacles and actions the people take to cope with, succumb to or overcome them. (Dervin 1980).

Rural Africa is facing a lot of developmental problems ranging from poverty, environmental degradation, gender inequality and imbalance, illiteracy, lack of access to water and basic sanitation, hunger, malaria, tuberculosis, HIV- AIDS and high rates of maternal and infant deaths. These problems were captured in the eight (8) points Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) at the millennium Summit in 2000 as an expression of a renewed commitment to improving the quantity of life for all. (Akpotor & Imoh 2009) These eight (8) Millennium goals are time bound and have quantified targets that are holistic in the true sense of the word, because they focus, not only on income and poverty but also on other forms of deprivation which restrict personal freedom, such as freedom of access to health, education, shelter, good governance sustainable environment and security.

However true as the MDGs may be for the developed countries, they may be unattainable for African countries because previous actions and development dialogues did not recognize the need for an integrated, multisectoral, multidimensional, cybernetic and participatory approach to development.

The challenge is to forge new alliances and partnerships between governments at all levels, civil society organizations, the private sector, traditional institutions, women groups and the youth to ensure that development policies plans and programmes targeting the rural people are sensitive, inclusive, endogenous and participatory.

This paper critiques the existing paradigm, framework and strategies that underlie development communication in rural Africa with a view to conceptualizing a new approach,

which will address the challenges and constraints in Africa Rural Development. This alignment, according to Ayedun-Aluma (2010:119) is necessary, if Africa is to develop.

The dominant paradigm has been associated with a one way dissemination of information to induce understanding and compliance in the audience, in which case, communication is concerned mainly with message production, dissemination, with communicators seen as technicians, who are urban, literacy and mass media biased and messages are largely persuasive, merchantilistic and mobilization centered.

The alternative paradigm which this paper advocates is based on liberation self reliance endogeneity, path dependence and popular participation.(Salawu 2007.2)

The paradigm sees communication as a 2-way interaction between a communicator and the audience, aimed at bringing about reciprocal understanding between both parties. To be effective, such communication should induce formative research, communication planning, message design, pretesting and production, dissemination, monitoring of implementation for feedback and evaluation of impact.

To mobilize for development the vast illiterate masses of the rural area in Africa, extensive change in knowledge, attitudes and behavior are needed (Moemeka 2012. 134)

The thesis of this discourse therefore, is that, there is need for community dialogue to actively engage rural communities in development so that they do not end up as passive receptacles of development decision making (Akpan 2012:207)

Every sector, group and strata of rural societies must be engaged to share information, experiences, perspectives, viewpoints and expectations in order to develop solutions to community concerns and expectations.

This paper proposes a decentralized, multisectoral and multimedia approach that combines mass media with interpersonal and group communication in such a way that rural people have access to mass media infrastructures and physical participation in media activities.

WHAT IS DEVELOPMENT?

Development implies changes in relationships with the internal physical, and the external socio-economic and political environment instead of being controlled by it, a change from impotency to potency. According to Miller (1981), the primary task of a development programme is to help the client system to increase control of its environment. Rural people have historically been excluded and unreached by development workers, services and messages. These people must be competent enough to make meaningful and authentic decisions and participate as equals in the development process. They must be empowered so that they can receive and give information as equals in a shared process. The challenge is to build the communication capacity of rural people so that they can have the skills and the opportunity to participate as equals. Thus, for development to be attained, national and sustained development efforts must begin in the context of the rural beneficiary communities.

Soola (2002:18) defines participatory communication as the bidirectional sharing of ideas, information, knowledge and experiences among co-equals, a necessary ingredient for development. Participatory communication ensures that development community people are the most qualified at the local level to decide if, and in what ways a given project's planning and objectives are situation realistic in the context of the people's needs or the local level. It ensures that rural people are involved; informed and motivated to participate in the planning

of their own development and are empowered with skills required to improve the quality of their life.

THE CONCEPT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Generally, the concept of rural development deals with promoting the welfare and productivity of rural communities. However, the International Rural Development (IRD) concept of rural development is one of “growth and equity” emphasizing the need for an integrated approach to poverty alleviation, through the simultaneous development of both human and physical capital. The International Rural Development concept attempts to integrate a number of components including credit facilities, extension, input supply and marketing, roads, irrigation schemes and storage facilities, water supply, rural electrification, education health and housing.

Operationally, rural development can be seen from three dimensional perspective, which includes:

- i. **Institutional dimension:** who decides, who acts and who is affected
- ii **External Dimension:** This hinges on all levels, the number, types, power and functions of development agencies and the relation among them which affects the outcome at each level, and
- iii. **Spatial Dimension:** which is where action takes place and who the action affects.

Traditionally, rural development is most strongly associated with agricultural activities and with the provision of rural infrastructure.

DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

The term “development communication” was first coined in 1972 by Nora, Quebral, who defines the field as:

the art and science of human communication linked to a society’s planned transformation from a state of poverty to one of dynamic socioeconomic growth that makes for greater equity and the larger unfolding of individual potential.

More specifically, development communication refers to the practice of systematically applying the processes, strategies and principles of communication to bring about positive social change (Quebral 1972). The World Bank however, defines development communication as the integration of strategic communication in development projects (Manyozo 2006).

The theories and practice of development communication sprang from the many challenges and opportunities that faced development oriented institutions in the last century. Since then, different schools of development communication have arisen in different places over time (Manyozo 2006). These schools include the Bretton Woods School being the dominant paradigm in international literature and the other schools being the Latin American, Indian, Los Banos, African and participatory development schools. Leading theorists of the dominant paradigm were Daniel Lerner, Wilbur Schramm and Everett Rogers. The paradigm advocated the production and planting of development communication in indigenous and uncivilized societies. This paradigm was however criticized by the Latin American school, comprising Paulo Freire, Juan Diaz Bordenave, Luis Ramiro Beltran Alfonso, Gumacio Dagon and Cardoso (Mayonzo 2006). They argued that the dominant paradigm which located the failure of development problems on the underdeveloped countries was inappropriate for all parts of

the world; because they failed to address the real underlying problems of poor countries such as lack of access to basic services and therefore advocated participatory communication as the panacea.

The African school of development communication on the other hand, sprang from the continent's post-colonial experience. Africa saw the use of radio to promote educational, health and agricultural development especially in francophone countries. With support from FAO, some development programmes in Africa have used participatory communication approaches such as Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal (PRCA) to enhance project results and sustainability (Mayonzo 2006).

The Asian School of thought on the other hand, spearheaded by the University of Philippines, Los Banos (Guebral 1972), introduced the concepts of extension, cybernetics approach, participatory development and community participation in development communication.

DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT COMMUNICATION (DSC)

Development support communication is an integral part of development communication. Operationally, it involves development planning and implementation in which all agencies involved in the planned development such as policy/decision makers, field workers, media personnel, opinion leaders, researchers and beneficiaries are linked.

DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION AND DEPENDENCY

Historically, the concept of development communication was initially promoted in the 1950s by several groups within the United Nation's system, the Agency for International Development and international bodies such as the World Bank, as a tool for transforming the traditional societies of newly independent nations into viable geopolitical entities. At that time, development communication was defined as the study, analysis, promotion and evaluation of communication technology in all sectors of development. Its aim was to promote and facilitate the participation of the rural poor in the sharing of the benefits of development as well as in the responsibility for development decision making (Balit 1988:3).

Consequently, development communication was introduced as an integral approach to rural development wherein communication support was provided to communities on issues pertaining first to education and later on to health, agriculture, population, women and nutrition programmes. The application of development communication system models derived essentially from dominant economic development theories of the west which emphasized only two of the many social roles of communication, information and persuasion. By implication, such a communication approach has as its main goal, increases in production and consumption, high levels of capital investment and the trickle down of benefits.

This model of development communication has been criticised by development communication scholars because of the inherent flaws and biases. Middleton (1981) Bordenave (1976), and Ascroft (1981).

First, is the pro-innovation transfer bias, which assumes that the adoption of technological innovations will lead to individual and national development (Rogers, 1976). The pro-innovation bias led to the assumption that knowledge flows only linearly from researchers through technology to users and that only knowledge obtained through scientific research is

relevant to problem solving. Consequently, it was believed that once the extension worker embraced the pro-innovation transfer concept, he can act as the most logical, scientific and systematic method for disseminating more productive and useful knowledge and skills to potential users. (Bradfield, 1966).

The extension worker was in that respect expected to evolve into a change agent and influence adoption decisions in a direction that he feels desirable (Rogers, 1962). This one-way flow of influence oriented messages from development workers at the top to the rural peasantry at the bottom, otherwise known as “top-down” and pro-persuasion model of communication, encouraged authoritarian, persuasive and manipulative communication that created dependent rather than collaborative relationships between the source and the receivers of development messages.

By assigning a subordinate role to the peasants, their freedom to choose, select and reject from an array of alternatives was compromised. This approach limited the effectiveness of the extension communication.

In the first place, the extension workers whose effectiveness depends on face to face communication, are grossly inadequate and greatly outnumbered by the teeming masses of rural people spread over huge diverse geographic and cultural areas, many of which are sometimes difficult to reach. Another major disability of the extension worker is the lack of adequate mass media channels to carry messages to larger audiences in the rural areas. However, the need for innovation diffusion and the advent of transistorized radio in the late 1950s, brought with it, the pro-mass media and pro-literacy biases which equated development with modernization and mobility with empathy (Schramm 1977). The belief was that literacy in an urban milieu will lead to the emergence of a mobile personality highly empathetic to modernizing influences.

These modernizing influences in the urban setting it was assumed, would liberate the third world peasants from the stupefying bonds of traditionalism.

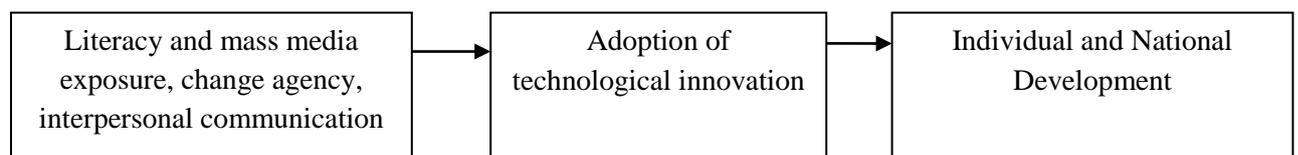


Fig. 1. The Mass Media and Interpersonal Communication Model of Development Communication

The weaknesses in this approach lie, first in the assumption that the introduction of new communication technologies (transistorization) will improve the efficiency with which information is transmitted to the populace and will thus help ensure the effectiveness of a two-way communication. The problem with this assumption is that access to the mass media does not necessarily guarantee exposure to and comprehension of mass media messages. Therefore, the assumption that exposure to mass media makes informed publics who automatically rally round development programmes are misplaced, because individuals selectively expose themselves to, pay attention to, retain and respond to mass media messages. Secondly the assumption that change agents (extension workers) will be able through interpersonal contacts to furnish target audiences with details of the information and skills necessary to make adoption possible is also flawed. This assumption based on the

“magic bullet” theory led to the erroneous belief that messages once received are accepted, and that early acceptors automatically act as role models to others in their social system to emulate. By the demonstration effects of the early acceptors, the innovation it was assumed, would trickle down to the rest of the community.

Evidently, the paucity of extension workers compared to the masses in the rural areas made their interpersonal influence and demonstration effect a drop of water in the ocean. Stated differently, the adoption of innovation is mediated by several factors some of which are outside the control of the extension workers (Imoh 1991).

Evidently, the spread of literacy, communication technology and urbanization has not led to the liberation of the rural people in Africa. In the first place, the level of literacy which is a proven indicator of development is still very low in Africa. The picture is pathetic in the rural communities where development extenders and facilitators such as schools, roads, electricity, essential services, radio receivers and other infrastructures do not exist to enable the innovation trickle down from the urban to the rural areas. In addition to the paucity of radio receivers and extension workers (multipliers) the educational, informational and motivational materials were often made for purely literate urban audiences, by urban based communicators in a language that did not lend itself readily to easy modification and adaptation to suit the non-literate rural masses. This way, adoption of innovation was greater in modern than in traditional societies. Such failure could be attributed to the fact that both mass and interpersonally mediated messages needed for development did not reach the rural areas and where they reached, they did not yield the intended results. (Rogers, 1962).

Cumulatively, the pro-innovation, pro-literacy, pro-urban, pro-persuasion, pro- mass media and top-down approaches which permeated the messages of development agencies in Africa have tainted the development process in African countries. Even in recent times, the donor agencies have been preoccupied with innovation diffusion research. Unfortunately, this bias on the part of donor agencies sees “feedback” only in terms of gathering information on “effects” without considering the receivers psychological orientation and the comprehensibility of the development messages. The pre-occupation with effects rather than the process of development communication has in my opinion led to the demise of many innovation programmes targeting rural communities. Many development projects designed by government and donor agencies continue to ignore the local needs, neglect local resources and alienate local and minority groups.

The development communication process does not engender understanding and enough awareness of the problems and opportunities (Awa, 1988). Consequently, there has been little grassroots initiative, involvement and participation. Participation has not included mental as well as emotional involvement of the people. A situation in which government agencies see themselves as dispensers of aid to the people creates conditions of dependency. Sometimes the involvement of the local people in the formulation and execution of development programmes has been seen as a threat to the beneficiary role of government and their functionaries (Balit, 1988).

This unequal, centralized, top down and authoritarian approach to development communication has not yielded the desired results in rural development. Bordenave (1981) Awa (1988).

PATTERN OF INFORMATION FLOW IN AFRICA'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT: THE TRICKLE DOWN STRATEGY

Traditionally, communicating new ideas to traditional societies has followed the “trickle-down” strategy which assumes that if the new technology meets the content criteria within the scientific discipline, then the people will certainly accept it unquestionably. But as Brown (1981) and Woods (1977) observed, the innovation did not trickle down to the rural masses, rather development communication has widened disparities between the social and economic classes and increased elitist entrenchment.

In Nigeria the majority of development messages get to the village level, where the people live, not via the mass media, but through interpersonal contacts made by Local Government officials, social groups, teachers, village health workers, extensionists and other volunteers etc. who reside in the village or district. The traditional leaders, through the village chiefs, town criers and age grades create awareness about programmes and legitimize their adoption. Religious leaders have played a positive role in spreading messages, while social groups have helped through face to face contacts, to inform, convince and motivate potential adopters of innovations (Imoh, 2008).

Evidently, the development communication projects did not succeed because the communication network is still inadequate to transfer the technology from the center to the periphery.

A major problem however is that any technological innovation is not being introduced in the rural areas in a vacuum. The traditional societies (rural masses) have had their own system. The new has to impinge on the old, if not oust it altogether, a task that is not very easy, because the new will be effective and adopted only when people realize or believe that the quality of care provided is good and better than their time tested traditional ways of living (Mburu 1977). The problem that arises therefore is that the modern and the traditional have little or no common referents, they are mutually exclusive. For example, the health official is armed with scientific laws of causation and systematically tested facts and he needs not be accessible to other ideas not amenable to scientific analysis. The traditional African on the other hand relies on what those before him have passed on to him true or false, actual or mythical. This way, they are both circumspect to their social and medical circumstances.

INHERENT GAPS IN THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES USED FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Several factors have been identified by Imoh (2008) as gaps in the communication strategies used for rural development. He observed that:

- i. Communication efforts have lagged behind the technical and operational aspects of many grassroots development programmes. The involvement and participation of the people have been taken for granted and not included in work plans.
- ii. There is the lack of integration of the efforts of the various institutions and organizations responsible for rural development at the local level with the result that there is inadequate political, financial and human support and commitment at the local level for development programme targeting the grassroots.
- iii. Evaluation of the programmes at the grassroots have usually been quantitative and focused on effects rather than process and as a result, it has been difficult to identify the contextual

variables standing between the people and their participation in development activities in their communities.

- iv. There is limited mass media involvement in promotional activities. Their role is often limited to fostering favourable attitudes towards government programmes rather than providing specific details of their adoption.
- v. There are limited interpersonal efforts by extension workers to reach the rural population scattered over large geographical areas, some of which are not accessible to mass media messages, outreach operations and static posts.
- vi. Communication with the people has not always used the channels most accessible and credible to the people. The field staff often lack the interpersonal skills and technical support needed to interact with the people optimally.
- vii. Very little attention is paid to the way in which traditional beliefs, practices and values of the people affect their responses to development messages. The influence that religious, traditional, youth, women and other opinion leaders in the community have on peoples decision to participate in development programmes at the grassroot level has not been recognized with the result they are often not targets of development messages.
- viii. Efforts aimed at creating public awareness and support for programmes and ensuring cooperation and popular participation at the grassroots level are invisible. The case in point is the voters registration exercise (2007), elections (2007) and census (2007) in Nigeria, whereby popular participation in these activities was low, because of poor publicity and promotion.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The attitude, knowledge and skills of rural people are major factors in development (FAO, 2006). But through no fault of their own, rural people often lack the basic education and the understanding of concepts, the confidence and self-esteem that would allow them to set about modifying their reality and it is hardly surprising therefore, that they often seem to fall back on fatalism as a refuge from their own incapacity. It is a sad fact that for the most part, extension services have not been able to measure up to the needs of the masses of rural dwellers, scattered over large geographical areas. According to the FAO (2008), most extension services are understaffed, undertrained and unsupported by the facilities they need such as transport, communication support, funds etc.

As a result, efforts at rural development in African countries have generally not been crowned with success. Indeed, for some “beneficiaries”, the results have been disastrous (Miller, 1981).

One of the major objectives of rural development programmes, is to rectify gross inequalities of wealth, because much rural underdevelopment in Africa is a consequence of historical subjugation which has generated demoralization, apathy, fatalism, submissiveness and dependency (Miller, 1981).

Rural people are trapped in a cycle of deprivation and have given up trying, they do not perceive themselves as having any choices. Following this diagnosis, Paulo Freire (1973) has recommended a model that will restore the self confidence that will release energy and motivation for self development. They learn that their impotence is a consequence, not of inherent inferiority but of historical processes that are reversible. An evaluation of many development communication projects in Africa and other third world countries shows that there are more signs of the top-down than of the bottom-up approach to rural communication.

These approaches Miller observes, are influenced less by good intentions than by the structure and culture of implementation. Government programmes targeting the rural people are perceived as a privilege, that they should feel grateful to receive, and not something they have a right to demand, even to fight for. At the level of the community, any concept of development plan is rare indeed and the micro regional or “pilot project” approach and interventions seem arbitrary and often unrelated to each other or to the priorities that the local population itself might have set. Recipients of development programmes in rural areas are often perceived by development planners as incapable of assessing the options open to them or choosing among them.

As a result, many rural dwellers are distrustful of the government and its programmes, because of their experience with past government programmes that held the communities in the passive dependent posture that discourages them from moving into the more active autonomous, entrepreneurial posture that is necessary if they are to become capable of self-sustaining development. As Miller further observed, many development communication projects have misjudged the goodness of fit between the innovation being promoted and the prevailing culture and as a result, extensionists have ignored the pragmatic wisdom of peasant communities that has enabled them to survive. In some cases, the peasants have not acquired the requisite skills needed to use the innovation themselves and become dependent on the extensionists to sustain the adoption of the innovation.

Furthermore, the failure of most development programmes targeting rural population in Africa can be linked to the flow of communication and the inherent knowledge and communication gaps between the socially, economically and politically disadvantaged and the segments of the population with higher socioeconomic and political status (Donohue 1972). The communication gap has been attributed to several factors by Sobowale (1988). These include:

- i. Lack of structures to carry information to all parts of the country.
- ii. Geographical isolation of some target communities, because they lack good roads, are riverine or are reached only during the dry season by urban based and biased communication.
- iii. Lack of preparation of the target population to receive the development messages, through simple research on audience propensities, intentionalities and sociolinguistic background.
- iv. Unstable political and economic climates that have been the rule rather than the exception in most African countries. This instability has not been conducive to a coordinated and efficient performance by a mass media system that has the onerous duty of mobilising a developing nation against ignorance, superstition, disease and galvanising it to achieve a self sustaining development.
- v. The structure of the ownership of the mass media in most African countries that have not enhanced the proper utilization of the channels of communication for development purposes and lastly,
- vi. The high prevalence of dysfunctional communication technology such as, video tapes, cable television, and other computerised gadgets that has produced dysfunctional diversions in many African countries. These gadgets consumed mainly for cheap and popular entertainment, could divert people from more serious informational, educational or developmental messages that could be competing for attention.

Oblivious of these limitations, development planners have formulated development strategies and designed messages for rural audiences without considering the political, social, economic and cultural contexts of the rural societies. Consequently, development programmes were inhibited. They were inhibited because the social mobilisers in mounting a campaign merely fulfill the wishes of the organisers while the basic needs of the rural dwellers who are expected to change are ignored. The mutual exchange that is supposed to exist between the change agents and those supposed to adapt the new idea or practice does not usually exist. Isoba (1986) warns that by emphasising only the interest of government and playing down on the needs, beliefs and practices of the people, social mobilisers can hasten the demise of many development programmes targeting rural people.

Development programmes may fail if the development communication planners fail to consider the needs, beliefs and practices of the people and their capacity to change. This consideration enables development communicators to empathise which in real development terms plays a critical role.

TRANSFERABILITY OF WESTERN MANAGEMENT CONCEPTS TO NON-WESTERN SOCIETIES IN AFRICA

The management of development communication projects implemented by donor agencies in Africa are based on the transfer of non-western techniques to non-western contexts. But the transfer of western management practices into Africa has had some disappointing results (Moris, 1981). Some of the greater managerial barriers to the effectiveness of development communication programmes consist of administrative traditions, originally derived from the metropolis itself. This pro-urban bias in both the source, the channel and the messages of rural development has tainted the work of development oriented organizations. In the African context, a cybernetic paradigm is needed to focus attention on the processes rather than the techniques of decision making in Africa's rural development. According to Moris (1981), the western management model which presumes that major policy decisions either can or will be made by an all-knowing central decision maker on the basis of rational, efficient and economic calculation is inadequate and inappropriate. In Africa's rural development, decisions take place at various levels and settings and contexts. Because of the heterogeneous nature of African societies, everyone has to address his own definition of their purpose, priorities and needs within the context of a changing environment, their capability and the problem they face in trying to satisfy these needs and purposes and overcome their problems.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Dependency Theory

The dependency theory is a body of social science theories that emerged as a reaction to the modernization and diffusion theories of the West (Vis Wiki 2009). Originally developed in Latin America (Cardoso 1978), dependency analysis was informed by Marxist and critical world system theories according to which the problems of the third world reflected the general dynamics of capitalist development.

Against modernization theories, dependency theorists argued that the problems of underdevelopment in poor countries was determined by external factors and the way former colonies were integrated into the western economy. (Tausch 2003, Cardoso 1979). It forcibly stated that the problems of underdevelopment were political, rather than the result of the lack of information (Hornik 1988). The superior economic and political power of the West

enabled them to make decisions that enabled them to maintain underdevelopment and dependency in developing countries. It is the central contention of dependency theory that poor states are impoverished and rich ones enriched based on the notion that resources flow from a “periphery” of poor and underdeveloped states to a “core” of wealthy states enriching the latter at the expense of the former (Vis Wiki, 2009).

Critics of the dependency theory argue that dependency theory leads to (i) Higher rates of corruption in state-owned companies. (ii) Lack of competition as companies may have less incentives to improve their products as in-country companies are subsidized to prevent outside imports and (iii) Lack of sustainability, as government support may be unsustainable for very long, particularly in poorer countries which may largely rely on foreign aid for the implementation of development programmes.

Economists however argue that some dependency theorists’ complaints are legitimate but believe that most of their policy prescriptions will only increase the disparity between the developed nations and the underdeveloped countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Vis Wiki 2009).

The implication of the dependency theory is that even after independence, many African nations still depend on the western nations for many reasons, including technology, financing, models and even mass media content. This structural legacy of imperialism with which many African countries have struggled, have led to a dependency relationship between the peripheral countries of Africa and the developed core capitalist nations. (Amin 1976, Tausch, 2003, Cardoso 1979). Dependency theorists also argued that internal structures within countries also led to underdevelopment, as development programmes were inhibited by inequality in access to services and improved social conditions which made it impossible for people to adopt new attitudes and behaviour. By targeting individual behaviour change without addressing social conditions, innovations promoted by development programmes were not adopted.

The pro-urban, pro-mass media and pro-literate biases in development activities also alienated the non-literate rural dwellers. In singling out the mass media, as having a control role in introducing innovations, they overlooked the issue of media ownership and control and this has led to the failure of many development campaigns targeting the rural poor (Vis Wiki, 2009).

NEW APPROACHES TO RURAL COMMUNICATION

The essence of development programmes is to satisfy the needs of the people, especially rural dwellers. Development planners must therefore ensure the participation of the peasants in the whole process of local planning, implementation and in the monitoring and evaluation of the results of development programmes targeting them (FAO, 2006). Case studies of development communication projects in rural Africa seem to suggest that development communication has brought special interest and placed potential value on development communication projects in rural Africa. (FAO, 1987). Accordingly, the FAO has proposed the following approaches;

- i. Development of communication strategies based on audience research and the production and distribution of educational materials for use by implementors and beneficiaries.

- ii. Training of development workers, extensionists, volunteers within the community so that they can effectively interact with and educate the beneficiary communities
- iii. Decentralization of the communication system and ensuring institutionalization through transfer of responsibilities to the target communities.

However, decentralization of responsibilities without funds and capabilities has plagued many development programmes. In line with this modern thinking, the author supports the strategy that will contain selected elements of advantages of integration with selected elements of advantages of separatism. The advantages of integration for less developed rural areas, lie in free and self determined access to technological and organizational innovations as well as in access to development messages and services. On the other hand, the advantages of separatism should lie in cultural and institutional semi-autonomy of less developed rural areas, and in the possibility of a certain degree of spatial closure in which barriers to free resource withdrawals and to further concentration of power should be drawn along territorial lines at different hierarchical levels. (Ekuerhare 1989).

Consequently the communication approach that has evolved in recognition of the need to equalise the relationship between the source and receivers of development messages is that of social development. Derived from the concepts of social system and innovation diffusion (Rogers 1976), the approach demands from the communication system the opening up of new channels for grassroot self expression and dialogue which grows out of the recognition of the importance of egalitarian communication relationships in which the participants in the communication process both give and receive information, and in which all participants including the senders and receivers can expect to change (Bordenave 1981). The new development communication approach which came along with the emerging alternative theories of development emphasised “self reliance” as a development strategy. This reflected a view of development which is bound to the social, cultural, economic, political and organizational contexts. It implied the structural transformation of all internal centre periphery formations in such a way that in theory each periphery should constitute a centre of development. Abass (1988) Ekuerhare (1989).

In operational terms, this implied equitable distribution of, and equal access to the benefits of development, to ensure the satisfaction of the basic needs of the masses and a creation of dynamic development impulses within the rural communities on the basis of their own self-determined societal standards and of the subordination of external, economic, social and political interactions to these standards (Inayatullah 1967).

This new communication approach to development also demands from education, a problematizing pedagogy based on direct participative observation of reality, development of critical consciousness, originality, innovativeness, coupled with the development of the “solidaristic spirit” conducive to cooperation and self reliance.

The mass media role in this new dispensation is to adopt a less profit oriented and social development oriented philosophy, such that their programmes adopt new contents and formats that can facilitate community self expression, dialogue and participation that allows the ruralites greater control over their own environment and over their own political destiny.

Under the present communication environment, considering only the electronic media to be the only instruments of communication with the rural population would be far from the reality. Even though our attention has been deflected from investigating the relative

effectiveness of traditional media, the author calls for the recognition, adoption, development and refinement of the traditional media as the only hope for providing the much needed communication at the grassroots level.

Despite the democratization of the communication process, it is evident in most development communities projects that the planners rarely consulted indigenous knowledge and women in rural development (Awa, 1988). By not using indigenous knowledge in conjunction with scientific knowledge in rural communication we cannot hope to improve the conceptualization of research problems and development of research instruments (Obeng Quidoo 1986). It is my strong belief that rural development may not achieve the desired results unless we mobilise local resources and promote increased dialogue between groups with technical and scientific knowledge and those with indigenous knowledge. On the one hand, experts learn about the people's needs, beliefs and communication network, and on the other, people learn the technique and proposals of the specialists. The outcome of such an exchange will not necessarily be the replacement of traditional techniques by modern ones, but the merging of modern and traditional systems to produce something more appropriate, that suits the economic and technical capabilities of the people as well as their cultural values (Balit 1988:3).

Short of the much needed mass media support, rural development communication may have to be reinforced by strong group/interpersonal communication, the type that facilitates social interaction and group action (Kamau, 1986). Women as major actors in the rural areas can provide that interpersonal support. By recognising, educating and training women, we can in the view of this researcher utilise them both as extension workers and as group leaders to help disseminate development messages among rural women. In Nigeria women and children have been used to reach women under purdah with immunization and other child survival messages (Imoh 1991).

THE PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

The participatory approach is derived from the sustainable human development school of thought. A redemptive attempt to address the dependency issue, it encourages decentralization, endogenous and multisectoral approaches to planning and decision making. As Yoon (2003) stated:

its focus is on people, their liberation and self-reliance. Its goal is to improve the quality of life, conserve and enhance the peoples values, beliefs and cultures, in order to ensure social justice, freedom and sustainable development. This model otherwise known as the multiplicity model, stresses that development has to be situation specific. Every society is distinct in its historical, socio-cultural and economic conditions and no universal model is applicable, a multiplicity of strategies will have to be used, based on each society's "initial conditions.

In line with this thinking, Servaes (1992) advocates the use of indigenous resources and local social systems to bring about social change and development at the local level, to ensure that the basic needs, interests, preferences and values of the people are protected. The participatory communication approach encourages information generated within the community as opposed to that externally generated. As Servaes further explains, information is given less prominence than the processes used in sharing and using information. The role

of the change agent in this model is facilitative and supportive, to enable the people themselves consider, decide and act on development messages.

In this context, a thorough understanding of the audience perspectives by development planners is a necessary prerequisite for interventions targeting rural people. It has become known through research that by getting and giving information to potential users, programme planners are better equipped to design more salient messages because the audience has been involved in the message design and conceptualization.

This new perspective is a deviation from our past dependence on formal survey research and information gathering designs to small behaviourally oriented studies, concept testing, focus group discussions, behavioural trials, intercept interviews, exit interviews and ethnographic studies. These tools can help the development communication to identify the hidden barriers the people may encounter in trying a new product or accepting a new idea.

By unveiling the less visible incentives, which might inhibit or promote adoption, programme planners and message designers are better able to select vocabulary which the people will understand. That way they are able to integrate the innovation into the individual's own view of problems and needs. It also allows planners to detect the weaknesses, in the campaign objectives, strategies and messages.

Recognizing that radio, television and newspapers are largely for the exclusive benefit of the urban dwellers, participatory communication places emphasis on a multichannel system which is a blend of the interpersonal setting with the use of modern communication and informal traditional/group media which include theatre, public address system, mobile cinema outreach activities etc. These channels are culturally appropriate, cheap time, saving and group anchored (Eyoh 1986).

Research has also shown that involvement of social groups, age groups, clubs, churches, mosques, women groups, professional groups, non governmental organizations and community based organizations has brought greater participation in the innovations to be adopted (Ascroft et al 1981).

SUMMARY

Rural communication can be effective, if an emphasis is placed on an integrated and multisectoral approach to programme design and implementation that includes the ministries of Agriculture, Education, Rural Development, Health and non-governmental organizations. The success of any development programme requires the services of an active field staff to conduct outreach operations, communication interventions and provide quality services and useful information to receivers at the community level. To be effective, these workers require training, supervision and research with programme service providers and rural beneficiaries on knowledge, attitudes and practices relating to the innovations. This type of research includes, knowledge of their media habits, patterns of information flow and decision making. Information gathered from such research forms the basis for selecting media channels and designing messages that are salient for specific audiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance the saliency, fidelity and congruency of messages disseminated, educational materials should be pre-tested prior to use to ensure that the target audiences understood the messages carried. Because of the nature of rural societies, the communication strategy should integrate information in a variety of ways through town criers, animation, songs, radio, posters, charts, flyers and extensionists. Such information should motivate the rural people with inbuilt educational component that persuades them to demand for services and learn how to use these services. Because of the multilingual nature of Africa, efforts should be made to use local language, local media and local network to enhance comprehension of development messages, generate interest and feelings of ownership of programmes. As part of process evaluation of interventions, there should be continuous monitoring of specific indicators of change and performance. This permits midcourse adjustment of programme content and targets. In order to eliminate the dependency relationships between the rural areas and development planners, there is need for a bottom-up communication approach that actively involves ruralites in problem identification, message design and in the identification of strategies that are capable of reaching and producing uniform comprehension and acceptance among rural audiences.

Furthermore, there must be an emphasis on an integrated and Multi-sectoral approach which includes the ministries of Agriculture, Education Health, Rural Development, Non Governmental Organization, Women and Youth groups in programme design and implementation.

In order to improve the effectiveness of extensionist interventions, there is need for training and supervision of development workers both in content and interpersonal communication so that they can provide quality service, and useful information to receivers.

Above all, rural communication must be research driven. This type of research includes socio-behavioural studies on audience propensities and predispositions, their media habits, and decision making. Information gathered from such research forms the basis for selecting media channels and designing messages that are salient for specific rural audiences.

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