

THE DYNAMICS OF COMMUNICATION IN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT. THE CASE OF THE SOUTH-EASTERN STATES OF NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT: The poor and deplorable condition of Agricultural development in the South Eastern Nigeria has become a regional concern, especially with the notion that agriculture is an occupation for the poor, illiterate and the old. The work investigated the role of the media in agricultural development as well as the level of audience awareness of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) agricultural development programme as strategies and effective tools for dissemination of agricultural development programme in the South Eastern Nigeria. Methodologically, the work adopted a survey method of data collection to elicit information needed. The findings revealed that most rural agriculturists do not have access to NTA stations and programmes. This is principally due to poverty and lack of infrastructural development. The subsistent farmers are found at the lowest rung of development, and so were cut off from modern information that can better their lots. The work stressed the need for upgrading the NTA to be responsive and grassroots oriented by using local content features like language, time, message and scene to transmit agricultural development programmes. The work is a clarion call on the government to be proactive in the development of infrastructural facilities like electricity in the villages, good road networks, as the establishment of weekend viewing centres for watching agricultural development news, commentaries and programmes transmitted in the form of drama and discussion. This will act as a panacea for development of agriculture at the grassroots.

KEYWORDS: Communication, Agricultural Development, South-Eastern States, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) occurred following the promulgation of Decree 24 by the then Federal Military Government in May 1977. The decree which took effect retrospectively from April 1976 brought all the ten existing television stations under the control of the Federal Government. They included the Western Nigerian Television (WNTV) established in 1959 which later became NTA Ibadan, Eastern Nigerian Television (ENTV) 1960 later to be known as NTA Enugu and Radio Kaduna Television (RKTV) in 1962 which later split to become NTA Kaduna and FRCN Kaduna. Ume (1989:56) puts it succinctly;

The establishment of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) was the first attempt by the Federal Government of Nigeria to have a centrally financed and coordinated television industry. Born out of an experiment in joint broadcasting in Nigeria, the authority played a major role in further development of the industry. In order to provide effective and coordinated coverage of the second All- Africa Games hosted by Nigeria in 1973, all the broadcasting agencies in the country were pooled together to form the Broadcasting Organization of Nigeria (BON).

Instead of flooding the sporting arena with hundreds of radio and television crew from the numerous radio and television stations in the country, the new organization coordinated all the broadcasting activities and fed all the media units from that central pool. This experiment was so unifying and successful that the military government, a few years later, decided to unite all the various television stations in the country under one body - the Nigerian Television Authority. A decree (No. 24 of 1977) was promulgated with effect from April, 1976 establishing the Nigerian Television Authority.

The 1970 - 1986 periods, which coincided with intensive petroleum exploitation, was marked by policies that lacked interest in supporting agriculture. The strong decline in domestic agricultural production reduced the country to a growing dependency on imported foodstuffs. In the wake of the major food crisis in the country in 1976, such programmes like "Operation Feed the Nation" (1976 - 1979) and "Green Revolution" (1979 - 1983) were set up. These programmes focused on strengthening agricultural production, providing subsidized inputs, community development, and access to credit. However, they were implemented without a transparent framework to structure action, and the successive governments did little at ensuring continuity. The enactment of the Land Use Act in 1978 marked a historic turning point for land use management in the country. This situation was reversed in 1987 with the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) that sought to reduce the national economy's dependency on oil and promote the private sector as the engine driver of the economy. Thus, in 1998, the Nigerian government once again turned its attention to the agricultural sector by adopting an agricultural policy that had the objective, among others, of ensuring food security for the population through the development of local production.

Thus, the Federal government of Nigeria has embarked on agricultural development strategies and policies aimed at producing enough food for its teeming population. If the people in a Country are not properly fed, the act of governance becomes quite a big problem. The government in addition made provision for self-sufficiency in which, the government as a matter of necessity, consciously embarked on programmes and policies to raise productivity.

In addition to the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), the following establishments were targeted at improved agriculture:

1. Operation Feed the Nation (OFN).
2. River Basin Authority.
3. Integrated Rural Development Programme.
4. National Accelerated for Food Production Scheme.
5. The establishment of Agricultural and Co-operative Banks.
6. Green Revolution Programme (GR) among others.

The objectives of these programmes included the following:

1. Attainment of self-reliance and self-sufficiency in the production of food requirements.
2. Promotion of a linkage between agriculture and other sectors of the economy.
3. Equitable and reasonable level of distribution of income among food producers and the maintenance of good nutritional standards.
4. Revamping of Agricultural sector so as to generate employment opportunities.

These programmes have served as a strategic framework for the attainment of a sustainable agricultural development environment. For instance, since the appearance of the document "Agriculture in Nigeria: The New Policy Thrust" in 2001, the government has

been able to assign the agricultural sector an ambitious role in its strategic planning frameworks. The strategic document for reducing poverty in Nigeria, "National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy" (NEEDS II 2008 - 2011) emphasizes an economy driven by the private sector, while the "7-point Agenda", is a framework economic reform in the country. Adopted in May 2007, they are the medium-term policy documents intended to help the country in achieving the Millennium Development Goals as well as the "2020 Vision" plan.

The strategic frameworks in NEEDS II and the 7-point Agenda have been translated into short-to-medium-term programmes. The Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources has drawn up a "5-point Agenda" for agriculture, a detailed roadmap of steps to be implemented to attain the objectives listed for agriculture in the 7-point Agenda. The Olusegun Obasanjo government also launched the Presidential Initiatives in 1999 for seven agricultural products (cassava, rice, vegetable oil, sugar, livestock, cultivated trees and dry grains). The aim of these initiatives is not only to boost Nigeria's agricultural exports by taking advantage of preferential agreements in the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Economic Partnership Agreements between the European Union and the Africa-Caribbean-Pacific countries but also to make the most of the potential regional market made up of neighbouring countries. Although these measures have shown that investment in the agricultural sector can have concrete results in terms of increasing domestic production, their overall outcomes have been mixed and the only intensification of production segment has been taken into account, ignoring the downstream segments of the value chain (such as product processing).

Support for agricultural inputs has been a central element of Nigerian agricultural policy since the 1950s. This support consists primarily of distributing public subsidies so that farmers can easily acquire inputs (fertilizer, improved seeds, phytosanitary products). These level of federal subsidies have followed a spiky path, with highs and lows, and methods of implementation have been highly variable. In addition to federal subsidies, each state allocates its own subsidies for fertilizer. These vary greatly from one state to another in both amounts (50 to 150kg per farmer) and subsidization rates (from 10% to 50%). Even so, many farmers still find it difficult to obtain good-quality inputs at an affordable price and at the time they are needed. The governments are yet to set up an effective regulation and monitoring system to address quality issues and the diversion of subsidized inputs to outside the country.

Implications of Local/Traditional Agricultural Practices in Nigeria

The idea of traditional agricultural practices in Nigeria has been in existence for quite a long time. The practice entails the traditional and predominant method of clearing farm land through bush burning. In the words of Medugu (2009):

The use of firewood as cooking energy source has recently gained prominence, because of the high cost and non-availability of other cleaner sources such as natural gas. These activities increase the concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere trapping heat and causing global warming, climate change and sea level rise.

It has been observed that "prior to independence, traditional agriculture accounted for the bulk of Nigeria's export". But in contemporary times, traditional agricultural practice according to Garba (2006) *has led to the deforestation of the aspects and theoretical*

propositions. This gap, he further observes, reflects a socio-technological schizophrenia in developing countries, where societies are caught between their own values and traditions and the slogans of modernity and development. Embarking on massive agricultural development campaigns without providing links to the whole social system has not worked, and this has limited the effectiveness of development communication.

Mass Media and Agricultural Development

The benefits of the development communication programmes and policies in agricultural development in Nigeria are indeed quite enormous. The TV and radio programmes can only be successful when they are professionally designed, packaged and executed by the media experts and communication specialists. These individuals should attract governments' attention to provide rural farmers with credit facilities, markets and other resources. Ultimately, there will be better rural development, and by extension national development. Hence, Egbule's view remains instructive (2009:14):

The mass media have performed poorly in disseminating the requisite agricultural information to the farmers. But the effective communication of new research findings and technologies in agricultural development to rural farmers has remained promising strategy for increasing agricultural development.

There is no doubt that agriculture is back on the development agenda. But despite the promises and the rhetoric from governments worldwide, investment in agriculture and rural development is still lagging. Communication for agriculture is also not seen as a major priority at either national or international level and the role of the media as an effective player in agricultural and rural development is undervalued. Reporting on agriculture is largely restricted to natural disasters, food shortages and rising food prices. Some argue, however, that the media has a potentially broader role in raising the profile of agriculture amongst decision-makers as well as the wider public, and in communicating farmers' needs.

The role of the media in agricultural and rural development was the topic of the 2009 annual seminar of CTA (Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Co-operation), an institution which works in the field of information for development. Over 150 journalists, communication specialists and development practitioners gathered in Brussels to discuss the constraints, challenges and opportunities for the media to promote more effective agricultural development. This is the idea of passing information or communicating to a very large number of people inhabiting in different locations or places at the same time. The distances between the various people are never a barrier, neither do they affect the content and structure of the message (Oluchukwu, 2004:156).

The mass media perform several important functions for the society, and individuals, by providing not only information, but also offering an even ways of escaping the problem that confront us. Its function of surveillance has to do with gathering and disseminating information on local, national and international issues. Such issues could range from the political, to the economic and the social. Paul Van Mele, a scientist at the African Rice Centre makes this point in the newspaper:

Out of so many channels, the conventional media, radio and television have become powerful, accessible and relevant forces of agricultural innovation and transformation

to Nigeria's policy makers that have shifted its potentials to unleash innovations on the farmers. Television proved a powerful, low-cost medium for farmer-to-farmer-extension and to expose rural communities to new ideas and practices. Farmer's innovations are often shaped by capital limitations and mainly rely on locally available resources of which knowledge is a key one, (Van, 2009).

Rural development receives poor media coverage. Most reporters consider the issue to be of little interest and relegate items on them to the furthestmost corners of the news. Furthermore, evidence of this fact is the rarity of specialist broadcasts on agriculture (Wood, 1995:12). The problem is partly explained by inadequate training facilities for agricultural journalism since collecting and diffusing this kind of information requires experience and a variety of skills. Knowledge of agronomy, economics, nutrition and the environment are prerequisites for journalists who want to understand agricultural issues. Unlike other sectors, such as human health, there is virtually no complete agricultural journalism programme available in Nigeria that takes all these different aspects into account.

Agricultural Development Programme of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA)

Since the inception of the NTA as the Federal Government mega mass communication medium we have come to see it as "Africa's window to the world", or "Africa's largest television network". The Guardian, in its editorial of Sunday October 18, 2009, expressed the view that *"the federal government owned television network is unarguably the largest of its type in Africa, but yet to have the operational freedom required to maximize the potentials"*. Nevertheless, the NTA's monopoly of the Nigerian airspace was broken in the mid 1990's with the establishment of privately owned television stations and networks, notable among which is the *"Africa Independent Television "* (AIT). Being a national mass medium for mobilization, the NTA can be viewed via the Africast. Its news bulletins are' frequently aired on *"Africa Independent Television"* (ATT) and *"BEN Television"* in the United Kingdom. The station was made available through the sky digital in the United Kingdom on channel 202, but it seems the channel was disrupted by saboteurs in early March 2010. The network is also available on the *"Internet Protocol Television Platform"* (IPTV) and *"Suncas Television"*- platforms in the IPTV through which television stations provide services to subscribers on the internet located in the United States.

Basically, the NTA programmes have tried to recognize the challenges in the agricultural sector, and proffer integrated and strategic interventions considered to be a more radical take-off from the subsistence, ad-hoc and fragmented approach of the past. Such programmes, aimed at increasing attention to the soil, production, storage, processing, packaging, distribution and marketing strategies, seek to target commercial agriculture, high-yield, mechanized, modern-techniques, processed and packaged production, increased and strategic government support, food export oriented and value-chain approach to agriculture that will transform the former and fight food crisis in Nigeria.

Problems of Agricultural Development Policy Implementation

A review of these programmes and schemes reveals that successive governments have demonstrated varying levels of commitment to agricultural development. This accounts for the uncoordinated and stunted growth in this sector of the Nigerian economy. One major problem that has become the bane of this policy is the lack of continuity associated with

government programmes. The effect of this on agricultural development has been far-reaching. Successive governments came in to introduce new programmes, schemes and institutions, which in most cases do not represent a continuity of the existing ones. Policies are therefore abandoned midway, in most cases, before their effects become manifested.

A corollary to the above is the uncoordinated manner in which agricultural programmes and schemes have been handled. Nsi (1993:203) laments:

Policies are pronounced and institutions set up that are in most cases either the negation of existing facility, or a duplication of it. A cursory look at the institutions mentioned above shows duplication and overlapping of functions and activities in the operations of most of them. It is therefore clear that there are issues of inconsistent {policies and lack of will in policy implementation that would need to be addressed. These two issues are negatively reinforced by intermittent change in government, resulting in lack of continuity. Overall, even with the proliferation of institutions, programmes and schemes, the impact on the ordinary farmer is minimal and thus no serious effect on agricultural output and outlook in recent times.

There are also problems at the micro (individual) level that borders on the management of farm, sources of finance, supervision, etc. In Nigeria, farmers are the most impoverished and backward of all professionals or businessmen. This is not the case in the developed countries where farmers are among the richest and most successful entrepreneurs. In addition, the level of extension services are yet to succeed in meaningfully changing the orientation of an average farmer, especially where there is a conflict of culture and tradition. Furthermore, the medium scale farmers are compelled to contend with serious issues of management, financing, preservation and weather. These are part of the problems that lent themselves for urgent resolution in the early years of the current administration ThisDay (2010) reports.

From a recent World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Report, rainfall in the semi-arid and sub-humid regions of Nigeria is highly variable and undependable, and influences agricultural productivity. Farming practices are gradually developing as a response to such climatic changes. And any changes in the current climate would further encourage risks to agricultural productivity, and the survival of the large populations in Nigeria and West Africa at large.

In addition, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report detailed many future risks of climate change on agriculture. In Nigeria, for instance, the area suitable for agriculture, the length of the growing season and yield potential, are expected to decrease. It suggests several adaptation strategies to fight the projected climate changes, including changing varieties, more efficient water use, altering the timing or allocation of cropping activities, improving the effectiveness of pests, disease and weed management practices, and the reduction of production risks. When these are widely adopted, they could yield substantial effects and fight negative impacts from climatic change and take advantage of the positive impacts. An integrated approach to planning and implementing the climate change adaptation-strategies in agriculture could help both the planners and the rural farmers to deal effectively with the projected impacts.

Several socio-economic obstacles appear to bedevil agricultural development in Nigeria. In the words of Abbah (2000), they include:

- i. Lack of the basic statistical data and knowledge of the socio-economic background, the

environment, the resources and the management capacities within the traditional production systems.

- ii. Rapid population growth, which in addition to associated socio-economic pressures, has outmoded the traditional farming systems that made the economic viability no longer to be appreciated.
- iii. The complexity of traditional agricultural production systems, the competition between the subsystems and non-farm components, and the farmers' interests in diversification, etc.

State of Agricultural Practices in the South Eastern States of Nigeria

Sustainable agriculture is an important element in the overall effort to make human activities compatible with the demands of the earth's ecosystem. Thus, an understanding of the different approaches to ecological agriculture is necessary if we must utilize the planet's resources wisely.

While sustainable agriculture is based on long-term goals and not a specific set of farming practices, it is usually accompanied by a reduction of purchased inputs in favour of managing on-farm resources. A good example is the reliance on biologically-fixed nitrogen from legumes as against manufactured nitrogen fertilizers. Low-input agriculture is one of the several alternative-farming systems whose methods are adaptable to sustainable agriculture.

Low-input farming "is based on a reduction but not necessarily elimination of chemical fertilizers, insecticides and herbicides. Farmers have been adopting these practices primarily to reduce costs, but also in order to minimize the impact on the environment or even in anticipation of regulations on the use of pesticides. In a search for information on "how to farm with fewer chemicals, it is helpful to examine alternative farming systems in existence that largely exclude chemicals in favour of biological farming practices. The experiences of producers who have successfully practiced these methods are valuable to farmers considering the transition to low-input sustainable agriculture.

Reaganold (1993:344) acknowledges the importance of sustainable agriculture as the practice of farming using the principles of ecology, the study of the relationship between organisms and their environments. This has been defined as an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long term:

- i. Satisfy human food and fiber needs.
- ii. Make the most efficient use of non-renewable resources and on farm resources as well as integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls.
- iii. Sustain the economic viability of farm operations
- iv. Enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.

The physical aspects of sustainability are partly understood. Bens and Dunlap (1990:590) refers to these aspects as *"Practices that can cause long-term damage to soil include excessive tillage (leading to erosion) and irrigation without adequate drainage (leading to salinization). Long-term experiments have provided some of the best data on how various practices affect soil properties essential to sustainability"*.

The most important factors for an individual site are the sun, air, soil and water. Of the four factors, water and soil, in terms of quality and quantity, are the most amenable to human intervention through time and labour. Although air and sunlight are available everywhere on earth, crops also depend on the soil nutrients and the availability of water. When farmers grow and harvest their crops, they remove some of these nutrients from the soil. Without replenishment the land suffers from nutrient depletion and becomes either unusable or suffer from reduced yields. Sustainable agriculture depends on replenishing the soil while minimizing the use of non-renewable resources such as natural gas (used in converting atmospheric nitrogen into synthetic fertilizer) or mineral ores, example (phosphate). Possible sources of nitrogen that would, in principle, be available indefinitely, include:

- i. Recycling crop waste and livestock or treated human manure.
- ii. Growing legumes and forages such as peanuts or alfalfa that form symbioses with nitrogen - fixing bacteria called rhizobia.
- iii. Industrial production of nitrogen by the Haber process using hydrogen, which is currently derived from natural gas (but this hydrogen could instead be made by electrolysis of water using electricity, perhaps from solar cells or windmills) or
- iv. Genetically engineering (non legume) crops to form nitrogen-fixing symbiosis or fixing nitrogen without microbiatic symbionts.

More realistic and often overlooked options include long-term crop rotations, returning to natural cycles that annually flood cultivated lands (returning lost nutrients indefinitely) such as the flooding of the Nile, the long-term use of biochar and the use of crops and livestock landraces that are adapted to less than ideal conditions such as pests, drought, or lack of nutrients (Ajayi 1990:487).

Finally, in the adoption of sustainable farming practices that depend on a high degree of management of biological resources, it is helpful to remember one or two ideas about the priorities in farming. Any system that allows people to get started, however imperfect, is the right system for that situation. In other words, Ajayi (1990), advises that we get the engine running first before adjusting the carburetor.

Overview of the South Eastern States of Nigeria

Eastern Nigeria was one of Nigeria's federal regions with Enugu as its capital. Established on the 1st of October 1954, what is today called Eastern Nigeria dates back to the division of the Southern Nigeria colony in 1954. Then in 1967, it was officially divided into three new states - East Central, Rivers and Southeast. The region, between 1967 and 1970, was later became Biafra. It is interesting to hear that as early as 9000 BC, people were already living at Iwo-Eleru in South Western Nigeria and Ugwuelle Uturu in Southeastern Nigeria, with hunting and gathering giving way to subsistence farming and the cultivation of staple foods, (J.G. Donli 2004:174).

The five south Eastern states are located within the vast geographical expanse that extends from 4°15' to 7°5' N and from 5° 32' to 9' E. This resembles a rhombus with sides of approximately 250 kilometres and covers an area of 76,355 square kilometres. Lying north of the Delta swamplands, East of the River Niger and West of the Cross River. In the South, it is found within three unequal parts by the Imo and Qua-Ibo Rivers. In the North, it rises greatly to "Awgu-Udi-Nsukka hills that run in a South-North geopolitical delineation. In the Northwest, it is bounded by the Anambra River, which is the most vital tributary of the

River Niger, and in the East-and-Southeast by the Cross River, whose general basin covers the Nigeria - Cameroon border. There are no impenetrable mountain barriers, nor large expanses of water or desert in the South - Eastern zone.

According to Donli (2004:174). The region was one of the Nigeria's federal divisions, dating back from the time of division of the colony in 1954. Its capital was at Enugu. The states originally were officially divided in 1967 into three new states, the East-Central State, Rivers state and South-Eastern state. The East-Central state had its capital at Enugu, which is presently part of Enugu state. The people are very industrious, enterprising and basically skilled in merchandising and agricultural and economic activities. With an extensive rainforest zone of economic trees such as Triplochiton Sclerox-ylon (Obeche) Milicla excelsa (Iroko), Swietenia Macrophylla (African mahagony), lovoa - trichilioides (African walnut) Ficuselastica (Rubber) among others, showing that, the eastern states have great agricultural potentials.

With more than 70% of the population predominantly farmers in the rural areas, constituting the largest group in agricultural production at the subsistent level. The farmers produce mainly tuber crops like yams (*Dioscorea* spp), cocoyams (*Colchicum* spp) cassava - (*Manihot esculenta* crantz), pineapples (*Ananas comosus*), plantain/banana (*Musa* spp), and because of the swamp, rice (*Oryza saliva*) is produced in large quantity and exported to nearby states within Nigeria. The people also engage in other economic activities such as pot making, cloth-weaving, blacksmithing basket weaving, wine tapping, etc.

Although the kings in the South Eastern' Zone had little or no political authority outside their villages. The village democracies consisted of autonomous units ranging from families, minimal and minor patrilineages, through major and maximal lineages to the entire villages and village groups. Furthermore, the societies have organizations closely allied to age grades that constituted the government of several communities. Although such organizations differed from each other in details of their constitutions, then had common features of being divided into smaller units depending on their size and history.

The political system in the zone was gerontocratic, and the actual organ of government was the village council consisting of the leaders of the various families or clan. As Forde and Jones (2004:9) put it:

These heads were their people's mouthpiece as well as the representatives of their families' ancestors. Thick forests and rivers, making communication very tasking, largely separate the region. This accounts for the reason why most of the people live in isolated villages and communities enjoying a segmented Republican Political System...another contributory factor may have been the absence of invasion or mass migration which would have induced or compelled them form large states administered by a centralized authoritative leadership. Finally, the alleged "individualistic" temperament of the peoples of this area and the strong evidence of a cultural emphasis upon individual achievement centralized organizations.

It is no surprise that the Igbo dominated the city of Port-Harcourt and controlled its politics and economy before the civil war. But the elite in the Rivers State have held sway since the end of the war and have taken the unprecedented decision to dispossess the Igbo of their landed properties in the new state capital, declaring them "abandoned properties". These

properties have remained a sore point between the Igbo and the Rivers people, who were among the minority populations of the former Eastern Nigeria.

Rural Farmers and Agricultural Development in the South-Eastern States

There are farmers who produce at subsistent level purely to keep themselves and members of their families going. They lack the inputs and implements, thereby making farming very tasking and unattractive. Thus, about seventy-five percent (75%) of the rural dwellers in this study are predominantly peasant farmers, working at the subsistence level with such crude and outdated implements as hoes, cutlasses, etc, on far-away farms on engendered roads with little or no access to basic public services. (Agboola, 2007:30).

Despite the enlightenment campaigns on television, the farmers are yet to embrace the modern agricultural innovations that guarantee food sufficiency. Apart from ignorance and adherence to old values, beliefs and norms, modern infrastructures are yet to be found in these rural areas. These challenges result in agricultural output being so poor to the detriment of the larger population in the towns and cities who depend on the rural farmers for food.

This study is thus concerned with the means by which agriculture can be effectively utilized to remove food crises and encourage massive agricultural development. What is needed at this moment is a paradigm shift from subsistent to commercial agriculture. It is little wonder that the Federal Government took the decision to part with the sum of two hundred billion naira (₦200 billion) for commercial agriculture, fifteen billion naira (₦15 billion) for subsidized fertilizer, ₦4.5 billion for rural road construction, and building of 85 rural IT centres, among others. The intention is to give a face-lift to the agricultural sector, and to ensure adequate food security for the citizens. (The Punch, May 10th, 2009).

The NTA is thus confronted with the enormous task of not only providing enlightenment and education for the uninformed farmers on how to, but also in instructing them on the basis of modern farming techniques. The Federal Government, under its agricultural extension service programme, undertaken by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources in conjunction with the National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA) has designed a programme of about 10,000 Agricultural Extension service providers (AESP) on crops and processing enterprises to train farmers for six weeks in batches in the six zones of the Federation.

In the five states in the South Eastern zone, youths were trained at the Songhai farm in Benin-Republic, as well as in China, Korea, etc. Investments were made in tractors, seedlings, subsidized fertilizer among other farm inputs, as well as massively procuring farm seeds. In addition, loans were made available to those who wanted to farm. Currently, a micro-credit scheme is available to assist the generality of the farmers in improving their welfare. These states, no doubt, are naturally endowed with the land mass as well as human and natural resources that can be harnessed to stimulate a realist agricultural development process.

To boost the on-going efforts of the Federal Government to reverse some of the challenges, a consortium of donor agencies has offered a helping hand to the rural farmers in the five South Eastern states. The beneficiaries of this gesture are already looking forward to the day they would rise above their indigent level to that of big-time farmers who could be relied upon by Nigeria's ever growing population.

Some of the initiative to boost agricultural production has been at the instance of the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the International Centre for Soil Fertility and Agricultural Development Services. This has led to the formation of a network of national Agricultural Research Organizations, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and local implementing partners for increase in rice production.

It was the world food crisis of 2008 that actually prompted this two-year initiative aimed at boosting rice production in Nigeria, Ghana, Mali and Senegal.

Shaibu, L. (2010) further explains:

Initiative is targeted at 10,000 poor rice farm-families in each of the four countries, adding that the objective was aimed at boosting total domestic rice production in each of the countries by a total of 30,000 tones of paddy rice with the current market value of about \$21 million.

This initiative aims at improving the farmers' access to rice seeds and fertilizer, and expanding knowledge on the best-bet rice technologies through on-the-job training, and through videos on rice technologies. The rural radio and television broadcasts on these technologies would also be used in reaching other farmers not directly involved in the project and in overcoming wastages. Determined to help farmers access critical information on farming and climate change, considering the fact that rural communities in Nigeria do not have access to modern information tools such as computer, radio and television, mobile broadcasts should be used to aid them access important information on agriculture and climate change.

The rural farmers should not only be encouraged to listen to radio and television programmes but also be given the chance to express their views and problems through their dialects on phone-in-radio programmes which can later be shown on television in order to proffer solutions to their struggles and challenges. This is called radio and television drama series. The focus on radio, in particular, is because information and communication management has been very successful with the radio listener. Attachment to the radio is very high in many parts of Nigeria and this is particularly so because radios are not very expensive. The results achieved through the radio, video broadcasts and community theatre are encouraging. This is more so with the weekly programmes which empower them socially, culturally and economically.

On a weekly basis, the viewers and listeners, mainly women that have formed listeners' group, sit around their village square with their radios at the time of the agricultural programmes to watch, listen, comment and exchange views. Later, the facilitators or representatives record their feedbacks on issues arising to make new radio programmes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory chosen and adopted in this study is the Development Media Theory. This theory, according to Okunna (1994:137), "is to use the press to serve the general good of a nation by making the mass media function as government instruments for achieving economic growth, political stability, national sovereignty, and cultural development". The theory is anchored on the development journalism. As Khueleni (2003:8), Domatob and Hall (2008:30) reveal:

It emerged to fill the chasm increasingly noticeable as the gap between the developed and developing countries widened. In their view, journalism and journalists should play major role in nation-building through creating national consciousness and unity, and encouragement of cooperative and peaceful existence between diverse and sometimes hostile communities. Their expectation of development journalism is that the Third World media practitioners should see the media as an extension of government policies of social, economic and cultural development.

Okunna (1994:138) expresses the same opinion when she said that development media theory accepts that "economic development and nation-building should take precedence over some freedoms of the press and individuals". But more importantly, the theory advocates that the mass media ought to assist government in the task of nation-building, and that government should control the media as well as journalists to achieve this goal.

McQuail (1987:121) lists the following tenets of development media theory:

- (a) That the media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy;
- (b) That freedom of the media should be open to restriction according to economic priorities and development needs of the society;
- (c) That the media should give priority in news and information with other developing countries which are close geographically, culturally and politically;
- (d) That the media should give priority in their content to the national culture and languages);
- (e) That in the interest of development, the state has the right to intervene in, or restrict media operations, and devices of censorship, subsidy and direct control can be justified; and
- (f) That journalist and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedoms in their information gathering and dissemination tasks.

In this theory, it is encapsulated the assumption that the mass media and other means of communication have the power to positively influence development process. Thus, communication as championed by rural journalists is mainly targeted at informing, educating and mobilizing the rural people for development to accept and participate with the development agents in their quest to better their lives.

The practice of development communication can be traced back to efforts undertaken in various parts of the world during the 1940s. But the widespread application of this concept came about as a result of problems emanating from the aftermath of World War II. The earliest advocates of this discipline include Daniel Lerner, Wilbur Schramm and Everett Rogers (Wikipedia, 2008).

This theory is the bedrock of this study in the sense that development planning and implementations are mainly anchored on the use of communication through a communication channel that achieves development. In the words of Okunna (1994:139),

"development communication denotes the employment of all forms of communication, and not only the mass media, in the promotion of national development efforts". She goes on to say that development journalism should pay sustained attention to the coverage of

ideas, policies, programmes, activities and events dealing with the improvement of life of the rural people.

Okunna (1999), goes on to say that the theory emerged in the 1980's to fill a void which became increasingly noticeable as the gap between the developed and developing countries widened. She continues: *"as this gap widened, it became apparent that none of the classical theories of the press (Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility) was strictly applicable to developing countries even though the mass media in these countries were operating according to some of the principles of the classical theories. Consequently, there arose the need for an alternative theory that could appropriately explain the media situation in developing countries"*.

This theory is hinged on the perception of the press as a powerful instrument that can be used to achieve positive development in any society Nwabueze (2005, p.5). Indeed, Wogu (2008) confirms that "the theory was propounded by African experts with the aim of channeling communication to development needs in third world countries". It rests on the belief that the media should be at the vanguard of development and that the mass media should not only be instrument of development, but also drive and determine development.

As Udoakah (1990) cited in Udeajah (2004,p.27) puts it:

In a developmental context, the media are used to highlight efforts being made by communities in building health centres, feeder roads, civic centres and similar self help projects. They are used to focus attention on government's efforts in developing the rural areas, through the provision of electricity, pipe-borne water, small scale industries, and roads in order to stop the drift of school leavers to urban areas. The media, in fact, are used by government in mass mobilization programmes.

Thus, the basic tenets of the theory according to Me Quail (1987) in Nwabueze (2005, p.5), are that the media should carry out positive development tasks in line with national established policy. He continues:

"the freedom of the media should be open to restrictions according to economic priorities and development needs of society, the media in developing countries should align their interests with news and information in other developing countries that are close geographically, culturally and politically, media operations should be restricted in the interest of development in that state".

The Development Media Theory, thus, sees the media as powerful and therefore, an instrument by which development can be achieved in a society. There should be in the media the use of the proper language and sending of the relevant message to enable development occur. The choice of this theory is clear from the fact that the study focuses on NTA's role in agricultural development. With this theory, we are able to centre our investigation on the role of the NTA in, promoting and achieving development in the agricultural sector in the South Eastern states of Nigeria. The theory directs communication experts to the potential ways of using the media such as the NTA to make development possible. This involves the planned and organized utilization of communication techniques (both mediated and non-mediated) to promote sustainable development or social change. By disseminating and sharing relevant information, and by eliciting active and conscious participation of the beneficiaries of

development it will be possible to know how far the NTA has gone in its set objectives.

Yet in support of the above theory, the researcher added a second one known as the Value change Theory. For in the words of Wogu (2008:179) *"The media do not just tell people the benefits or harms inherent in given behaviour, but urge people to compare their (people's) values against those of others, which the media portray as more socially acceptable"*.

The basic trust of this second theory is its use of a comparative feedback mechanism in forcing or persuading people to compare their own behaviour against what the mass media portray as good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable. For instance, the media's strong and convincing portrayals of the need for self worth, better health care and development possibilities, can to a large extent, induce many people, especially the target audience to reassess themselves to enable them respond correctly and adequately.

McQuail (1977:68), in support of Folarin (1988:74) and Burgoon and Ruffer (1978:77), who are psychologists, sociologists and human communication experts respectively, has stressed the relevance of the theory in changing human reasoning and behaviour for good on a given change situation. This theory serves as the framework for ascertaining the power, capability and role of mass media, in bringing about a change of attitude and behaviour on the part of the target audience. This is not a mere ordinary change, but one that has value and true meaning of life. In this study, it serves as basis for ascertaining the persuasiveness and convincing power of the NTA to change old attitudes and practices of rural farmers.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study seeks to measure the farmers' awareness, and the rate of participation achieved by the Nigerian Television Authority's agricultural programmes. It is pertinent to adopt a research approach that would allow for the interplay of the media and the farmers in such a way that the relationship between the variables are easily determined. As Redding (1970) notes, the strength of the field experiment lies in the "naturalness" of the situation, the setting and the experimental subjects.

In this study, the data collected were the descriptive data analysis. Therefore, all the primary data were collected from the farmers, and the Nigerian television authority through copies of questionnaire. The primary data were collected for use as the index of analysis. Such primary data on the media agricultural programmes included the duration and frequency of agricultural programmes in a year, the farmers' income, the farm output, farm size and benefits among others. The farmers' awareness of the NT A agricultural programmes and participation were also collected. Primary socio-economic data collected included the age of the farmers, their educational attainment, the farming experience, family size, gender roles, religion and ideologies, as well as the geographical, economic and political environment Furthermore, type of media agricultural programmes, the hours and frequency per such programmes, the programme language and the media programmes to drive government policies and farming system, among others as well as the geographical, economic and political environment.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study was carried out to analyze the role of the Nigerian Television Authority on

agricultural growth and development in the South Eastern States of Nigeria. In the course of doing this, the researcher employed field experience approach by using interviews and designed questionnaire to get the views and opinions of the target respondents who were mainly farmers in the South Eastern States like Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo on their level and impact of information and communication awareness from the NTA for improving their agricultural practices.

The main findings of this study show that NTA is one of the urban based mass-media that is mainly accessible by the rich people living in the urban areas where electricity or standby generator is readily available. For this reason, the NTA's impact on providing information and communication roles that would aid the farmers to achieve better standard and style of farming was lacking. Based on this fault, the researcher found out that the most suitable modes of presenting agricultural information to the farmers are through group discussions, entertainment programmes and television drama series presentations. In the discussions and entertainment programmes, the services of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and communication experts were employed. The drama presentation if well organized and executed help in creating an indelible mental pictures in the minds of the farmers regarding the usage, impacts, benefits and gains of such media agricultural programmes.

Furthermore, since most of the farmers were not well educated and trained in agriculture, the researcher discovered that the use of vernacular in the NTA's agricultural programmes would have changed the dimensions of modern agricultural production of the farmers in the South Eastern States of Nigeria.

On the other hand, the researcher observed that the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) no doubt had some programmes geared at improving agricultural production but poverty, illiteracy, inconsistent agricultural policies, bureaucratic bottleneck, inadequate rural infrastructures, corruption, high post-harvest food losses and lack of interest among the youths in agriculture had led to the inability of the rural farmers to produce enough food for commercial purposes. This requires capacity building of media agricultural programmes implementers to create live and new ideals, techniques and energize farmers to utilize or put into practice the information they see and hear on NTA.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the role of NTA on the development of agriculture in the South Eastern States of Nigeria using a well designed research method that captured the views of the actual respondents on the subject matter. It revealed the respondents' level of exposure, awareness and participation in the agricultural development messages and programmes of NTA in the South Eastern States of Nigeria which is invariably not encouraging. The role of the medium under study was adversely affected by so many factors thereby making the result/finding of the study weak.

In the first place, majority of the respondents were rural farmers who were neither well educated, nor trained in modern agricultural practices. Also, most of them live in rural areas, rely so much on the local farming implements and inputs and as well do not engage in large scale farming. In the same vein, the overall findings of the study were

negatively affected by the audience's poor access to NTA in their various localities. As a result of this, they were denied of most of the NTA's programmes on improving agriculture, especially within the South Eastern zone of Nigeria.

From all indications, this study has revealed some of the age-long factors affecting effective implementation and actualization of various agricultural programmes and policies initiated by the Federal Government of Nigeria. They include vastness of rural areas against few urban areas in the South Eastern States, poverty, illiteracy, lack of electricity as well as weak state and local government support and implementation of such agricultural development initiatives by the Federal Government and some concerned international agencies.

It was equally ascertained that no modern communication strategy, no matter how it was properly packaged for rural populace can achieve its purpose if it does not take cognizance of the traditional communication strategies. On this note, the viability of the NTA programmes towards food sufficiency and achieving national food security was not practically achieved as responses from the farmers in the South Eastern States of Nigeria failed to reflect on it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❖ The station should increase the hours presently allocated to vernacular programmes with various dialects, since its audiences are better entertained, educated and informed by such dialectical programmes because of the high illiteracy levels among the farmers.
- ❖ Appropriate feedback channels which is lacking or rather ineffective should be put in place to get feedbacks from the farmers. Such feedback channels as phone numbers, suggestion boxes and periodic survey are recommended.
- ❖ Furthermore, to consolidate on the present success, the NTA management should operate an open door policy. This will help to address issues quickly and amicably and also engender goodwill and public trust, which will eventually bring credibility to the establishment.
- ❖ The government should make serious efforts to attract the youths to indulge in farming and agricultural development by offering scholarships, grants and loans to agricultural undergraduates in the nation's universities and other higher institutions.
- ❖ The government should create an effective monitoring and evaluation of agricultural projects by system operators, so as to give the states the desired focus and orientations, guidelines on the monitoring and evaluation of the existing government initiatives. This will sensitize the farmers on the scope of the monitoring and evaluation, activities and their roles in effective policy implementation.
- ❖ The government should also make adequate provision of a computerized data on all the states government projects and programmes, its growth and problems, its failures and causes of such failures where obtainable.
- ❖ The Nigerian Television Authority should adopt more participatory approach to involve the farmers in the planning and execution of such agricultural programmes that is, giving it a human face approach.

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