
COMMUNICATION, YOUTHS, AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT: THE NIGER DELTA QUESTION

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examined the place of communication in mobilizing Niger Delta Youths for agricultural investments. The researchers adopted qualitative approach in conducting the study. This approach also entails that, the study usually depends on secondary data. Four objectives were formulated to guide and give focus to the topic. The study examined types of communication; intrapersonal communication, interpersonal communication, and mass communication. This study shows that Niger Delta has an active work force of about 16,134,968 people, and concluded that any development communicator saddled with the responsibility to disseminate agricultural investment information to Niger Delta youths should be well-informed not only on the subject matter but also about the target social system and about the possible solution to the social problem identified. The study is anchored on development media theory.*

KEY WORDS: Communication, Youths, Agriculture, Development

INTRODUCTION

Communication is one vital element in the human society that cannot be ignored. This is premised on the fact that, without communication, there is no life. Due to the importance of communication to man, scholars from different fields of human endeavours have defined communication differently. According to Harper cited in Gbiri (2015) defines communication as a scientific way of transferring (conveying) information (knowledge) through the exchange of ideas, feelings, intentions, attitudes, expectations, perceptions or commands. Communication is conveyed by speech, nonverbal gestures, writings, behaviours, and possibly by other means such as electromagnetic, chemical, or physical phenomena and smells from one place to another or from one person to another involving two or more participants. Obiechina (2015) sees communication as a successful way of sharing of thoughts, feelings, ideas and information with others through speech, writing, printing, electronic media, signals, among others for the wellbeing of the people. The definitions of communication by Gbiri and Obiechina indicate that, communication is the exchange of feelings, intentions, attitudes,

expectations and ideas. These are the main ingredients of communication which connote that communication is purposeful. The purpose may be to change perception, convince, persuade, mobilize, encourage, entertain, educate, inform, correct an impression and or create adequate awareness about developmental projects designed to enhance the well-being of members of the society such as the youths.

Every communication that conveys developmental projects such as agricultural investment opportunities is known as development communication. This type of communication usually involves deliberate, well desired and enunciated communication aimed at bringing development to the attention of the target audience. It also entails a proper understanding of the subject matter, the target and the cultural milieu by the communicator. Moemeka (2000,p.158) in his opinion of development and communication said:

The success of any human activity, especially those directed at development, is dependent upon four major over-reaching ‘‘ingredients’’. Knowing what to do, knowing how to do them, having the will and determination to do them, having the resource to do them. These ingredients facilitate acceptance and commitment which are basic requirements in the task of development and emancipation. For these necessary ingredients to obtain in the right proportion especially in the rural development, the communicator must learn about the people, determine their problems and their views about themselves.

But development in itself is a wider concept perceived differently by different people. As Todaro and Smith (2011) portray it:

Development must therefore be conceived of, as a multinational process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and the eradication of poverty. Development, in its essence, must represent the whole gamut of change by which an entire social system, tuned to the diverse basic needs and evolving aspirations of individuals and social groups within that system, moves away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory toward a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually better (p.16).

In recent years, the concern for development has been shifted to agriculture because livelihood of more than half of the economically active population in the *underdeveloped* and developing world are said to be directly dependent in whole or part on the environment through agriculture, as well as animal husbandry, hunting, fishing, forestry and foraging (Todaro and Smith, op cit). Agriculture provides employment for a large percentage of the country’s population and thus contributes to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), provide food for the teaming population, and raw materials for industrialization (Umolu & Egwa , 2012). This alone underscores the importance of engaging the

youths in agricultural development (investments) rather than mere agricultural activities. The youths in this context is the agricultural labour force (15-59 years), the age bracket that can actively work in the agricultural sector or in the allied industry in the Niger Delta, with much attention on the unemployed youths. In light of this study, Niger Delta States include: Akwa Ibom, Abia, Bayelsa, Cross River, River, Delta, Edo, Imo and Ondo states.

Objectives of the Study

The title of this paper is communication, youths and agricultural development: The Niger Delta question. The objectives are to:

1. Explore the importance of communication in attitudinal change towards agricultural development by Niger Delta Youths.
2. Expose various areas of investments in agriculture in the Niger Delta.
3. The relationship between communication and development.
4. Proffer practical recommendations and action points that will improve and sustain the economic empowerment of Niger Delta Youths through agricultural investments.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed qualitative research method. According to Burns (2000) qualitative mode of enquiry is characterized by methodological eclecticism, a hypothesis-free orientation and an implicit acceptance of natural scheme of things. Osuala (2005) sees qualitative research method as context-bound conclusions that could potentially point the way to new policies and decisions, rather than towards scientific generalizations. From the above view points, it is obvious that this study does not require research questions, hypothesis, or statistical interpretation of data but rather a presentation of the social realities that exist within social context.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is theoretically anchored on development media theory; a concept that was developed by a Commission set up by United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to look into the complaint of the Third World countries who alleged that Western media portray Third World countries in bad light in their news programmes. The Commission in its final report noted that Third World countries are faced with certain communication problems such as: (a) absence of communication infrastructure, (b) lack of professional skill and resources for the production of media products, and (c) absence of cultural resources and the available audience. The major tenets of this theory as enunciated by McQuail (2000) include:

*Media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with naturally established policy.

*Freedom of the media should be open to economic priorities and development needs of the society.

*Media should give priority in content to the national culture and language.

*Journalists and other media workers have the responsibilities as well as freedom in their information gathering and dissemination tasks.

*In the interest of development, the state has the right to intervene or restrict media operation.

Human Communication and Attitudinal Change towards Agricultural Development

Communication for attitudinal change can better be looked at from the narrow perspective of intrapersonal communication to interpersonal communication to mass communication. In this study, intrapersonal communication is defined as the communication process within an individual person. What goes on within us is known as intrapersonal communication, Shedletsky (1998) citing Maclean sees intrapersonal communication as self-talk, acts of imagination and actualization and even recall memory. Shedletsky also listed intrapersonal communication as a complex process with eight components; source, receiver, message, channel, feedback, environment, context and interference as transactional. Pearson & Nelson (1985) in their understanding averred that intrapersonal communication is not only an internal monologue but also involves our reactions to plans resulting from external message. They also viewed intrapersonal communication from the process of planning to problem solving, internal conflict resolution and evaluations and judgments of self and others relying on previous interaction with external world. Wilson & Itek (2006) writing from psycholinguistic foundations of communication perspective espouse on the importance of intrapersonal communication thus:

Any view of communication must necessary start with the psycholinguistic activities of thinking, reflecting, carrying on internal dialogue with oneself, reading one's writing(as in diary) or listening to oneself(as in tape recording)or even dreaming. These intrapersonal activities are critical elements in how we communicate because they form the basis of all other forms of human communication (p.36).

Given this background, it is expected that, every Niger Delta youth know that agriculture provides a unique opportunity for self-employment and reliance. X-raying Wilson & Itek definition of intrapersonal communication further, Niger Delta Youths should sit down and reflect on the economy of Nigeria, and compare it with countries like Malaysia, Burkina Faso, US, and Chad. These are countries where Nigeria imports palm oil, beans, rice and millet. This sort of self-reflection and realization through internal dialogue is indeed the first step towards embracing agricultural investment opportunities by Niger Delta youths.

Another type of communication that follows intrapersonal communication is interpersonal communication which entails the sending and receiving of information between two or more people. It is an exchange process that also involves the sender, message, channel and the receiver. In this process the sender is the initiator of the message, the message is the information that will be sent. The channel is the manner in which the message is sent, the receiver is the one to whom the

information is sent. The sender of the message is also the composer of the message which sometimes depends on the reason for the message, selection of channel of communication, the feedback and noise. Okunna (1999) averred that interpersonal communication takes place when two or more individuals and more individuals are involved. It is communication that goes on between persons, mostly in a face-to-face situation. Such a situation makes it possible for feedback to be immediate in interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication is unavoidable even if hell let loose, the spirit of dumbness on humanity, interpersonal communication is irreversible because you cannot take back what you said. According to King (2000) interpersonal communication is contextual which means that it does not happen in isolation; it can be psychological context which deals with who you are and what you bring into the interaction, relational context-which concerns with ones reactions to the other person, situational context which deals with psycho-social and environmental context-where you are communicating, physical conditions such as weather, cultural context includes all learned behaviours and the rules that affect interaction.

Obviously, from the above explanation of interpersonal communication, it can serve a better means of changing youths' perception of agriculture as poor man's endeavour to a business endeavour that can provide a total means of livelihood. However, this will stem from intrapersonal communication with the initiator of the communication conviction that agricultural investment is a lucrative business and not a punishment. It is on this premise, that he can now share his feelings, thought, perception, ideas and expectations on diverse agricultural opportunities in the Niger Delta. He can achieve his purpose through a number of means viz: face-face (one-on-one) with another Niger Delta youth, it could be in a small group as in dyadic communication in form of seminar, workshop, conferences and lectures. To effectively disseminate information on agriculture, the initiator of this type of communication for attitudinal change can also explore the new media of technology such as the use of mobile phone which has been found to be very popular means of communication among youths, multimedia such as computer, projector, interactive white board, pictures, video illustrations, tapes, CDs, and DVDs. Multimedia messages according to Ekenedo (2015,p.423) 'are much more effective than plain text because individuals remember 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, hear and do. The initiator can also use Laptop and digital projector to present agricultural talk to his sizable audience.

Mass communication is a third form or type of communication that is open to agricultural communicator who intends to change the perception of Niger Delta Youths towards agricultural development. Mass communication can be defined as the sharing of ideas, knowledge, feelings and messages through the mass media of communication by professional communicators to large unknown audience with immediate feedback mechanism due to technological breakthrough. Ndolo (2006) sees mass communication:

As standardized messages that are transmitted to a mass audience through mass media. The sender here becomes a source-a conglomeration of professionals that includes writers, cameramen, reporters, audio and video technicians, directors, floor managers, editors, etc who prepare and send messages through a mass medium to a huge audience. The receivers become an audience. The message becomes depersonalized and standardized. The feedback changes from immediate to delayed and quantified. The audience quantifies their feedback to media institutions by switching off channels and

dials that no longer hold their interest or stops buying their newspapers or magazines, or watching their films or listening to their music(emphasis on italics, writer) (p.16)

Applying the definition above to address agricultural concerns, six key items are to be noted:

Message: This is the very essence of communication. Message is what conveys ideas, feelings and information to the target audience. Okunna (1999) believes that in the process of communication, the information shared makes up the message or content of communication.

Professional communicators. They are concerned with the dissemination of information to a large unknown audience, scattered abroad, who cannot come together, who don't also know the disseminators of the information on one-on-one basis but consumed the disseminated information simultaneously. These disseminators are powerful societal instruments that change a whole lot of things through their services to the public. They can change public perception about issue, re-orient members of the society about an issue, mobilized members of the society to support a course of action, and or set agenda for the members of the society to follow, through the placement and repetition of such agenda in the media. This role is what is needed to educate and encourage Niger Delta Youths to participate in agricultural development.

The third key is the **channel of communication**. The mass media of communication are the channels of information disseminations by the professional communicators. The channels of communication matters so much in all communication encounters because the channel is the message. McQuail (2000) described the mass media as the organized means for communicating openly and at a distance to many receivers within a short time. Ate (2008) sees the mass media as impersonal communication sources that reach large audiences. He further described the media as powerful and influential channels of communication that affect perceptions and behaviour in a distinct way, and a unique modern means of public communication and much of which the importance lies in the fact that, they are a major cause of whatever modes of perception, thought, public discourse and political action taken by members of the society. In a similar vein, Murphy (1977) sums up societal powers of the mass media in three dimensional ways, as oil, glue and dynamite.

*As oil, Murphy states that media of communication keep the world running smoothly by helping individuals adjust to the reality of lives. They keep society on and healthy by suggesting solutions that are socially acceptable.

*As glue, social cohesion is maintained by communication. Murphy contents that the media give all of us including strangers something to talk about by setting agenda of discussion, and that over the years; communication builds up and reinforces the fabrics that hold society together.

*Murphy also describes the mass media as dynamite that can rip the society apart.

In disseminating information on agriculture to youths in the Niger Delta area, traditional media such as radio will be of immense importance. It has been found out that radio is common in the rural areas than other forms of the mass media because of its portability and affordability. Another unique attribute of radio that qualifies it for information dissemination on agriculture to youths in urban and rural areas is the use of many languages (English, local languages and pigin). The second important attribute of radio for dissemination of agricultural messages is that, radio signals travel far and can be received in the remotest part of the country. Apart from radio, television can also be used to disseminate agricultural messages to youths in the Niger Delta region. Television is an audio-visual medium that combines sound and sight to present information to the target audience. Because of the glamour with which television presents information, youths are always attracted to television programmes.

Apart from radio and television, Niger Delta Youths can also be reached with agricultural information using the print media such as the newspapers, magazine, journals, and books where important information concerning agriculture can be documented and disseminated to the target audience. These media required some level of educational attainment on the part of the target audience to enable them benefit from the information. One benefit of the print media is that the information is usually in a permanent form, target audience can always retrieved information whenever they are in need of such.

The new media: these are other channels of communication that agricultural communicator can explore in order to disseminate information on agriculture to Niger Delta youths. The new media include the internet and the social media etc. The internet provides a platform for media convergence. Radio, television, newspaper, and magazine are all available on the internet today. Today's youths surf the net frequently to assess information that appeals to them rather than relying on offline traditional media. The internet also accommodates the social media platforms such as the Facebook, 2go, WhatApp, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter, Instagram, Wikipedia, You tube, and Evernote etc. Social media are online platforms that enable users to interact with one another and share ideas, pictures, feelings, and learn new things such as investment opportunities in agriculture. Social media have six basic characteristics that attract youths: (a) challenge traditional models, (b) allow people to communicate uninterrupted, (c) allow people to collaborate in a virtual community,(d) give people audience (e) are open and transparent and (f) uninterrupted feedback mechanism.

Target audience: These are the recipients, receivers or decoders of messages in a communication encounter. They are usually composed of different sexes, belief system, educational background, economic level, religious belief, ages and consumed media products differently-in a manner that suit them. Their understanding matters so much in every communication encounter. In this study Niger Delta Youths are the perceived receivers.

Noise: This is anything that distorts meaning in any communication experience. Noise prevents understanding of the message.

Feedback mechanism: This is the last stage in every communication experience. This simply means a reply from the recipient of the message to the sender. Feedback also shows that there is a level of understanding on the part of the receiver in the communication experience; this is when communication can be said to be effective. Feedback shows that, there is total absence of noise, either semantic or channel.

NIGER DELTA YOUTHS AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The strength of any nation lies in the capacity of the youths to engage in productive ventures of which agriculture is considered to be number one. Nigeria is among many nations of the world with large youth population. Records have also shown that the youth population in Nigeria grows yearly, in what is described as youth explosion. Agu (2015, p.22) opined that, ‘over the next 20 years, the country will experience huge growth in the number of young people in its society. If these young people are healthy, educated and find productive environment, the country could emerge as a great nation. But if not, she could go down as a failed state given the turmoil that will befall her’.

Based on Agu’s assertion, there is need to group Niger Delta youths into social category in order to identify the educated from the uneducated, the healthy from the unhealthy because today’s agriculture is approached in a commercial sense. According to Littlejohn (1972) social categorization or stratification enables sociologists study inequality in society, that is, the unequal distribution of goods and services, rights and obligations, power and prestige. Social stratification also enables policy makers to plan and initiate policies for different categories in the society. Okolocha, Nwanunobi and Igbo (1999) averred that every society has a system of ranking people either as high or low or as superior or inferior. They observed that those who are ranked ‘high’ or ‘superior’ enjoy special privileges which elude those who are ranked as either ‘low’ or ‘inferior’. The category therefore could follow this order; Youths with no Formal Education/ Out-of-School Youths, School Certificate Holders, Young School Leavers, and Graduate Youths without Jobs.

The table below presents the active population of Niger Delta region (2006) .This population is globally accepted as agricultural labour force.

Table 1: Youth Population by State (15-59)

| SN | STATE | POPULATION |
|-----------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. | Akwa Ibom | 2,599,749 |
| 2. | Abia State | 1,764,134 |
| 3. | Bayelsa State | 1,137,14 |
| 4. | Cross River State | 1,983,740 |
| 5. | Delta State | 1,892,734 |
| 6. | Edo State | 1,778,351 |
| 7. | River State | 3,172,837 |
| 8. | Imo State | 2,827,845 |
| 9. | Ondo State | 1,661,221 |
| | Total | 16,134,968 |

Bureau of Statistics, 2010

Table 2: Distribution of Unemployed Youth Population in the Niger Delta

| SN | STATE | POPULATION |
|----|-------------------|------------------|
| 1. | Akwa Ibom | 1,355,337 |
| 2. | Abia State | 1,371,427 |
| 3. | Bayelsa State | 1,032,638 |
| 4. | Cross River State | 29,0429 |
| 5. | Delta State | 1,016,503 |
| 6. | Edo State | 1,290,797 |
| 7. | River State | 1,839,386 |
| 8. | Imo State | 984,233 |
| 9. | Ondo State | 564,724 |
| | Total | 9,745,521 |

Bureau of Statistics, 2010

With a careful planning, this vast unemployed population of **9,745,521** can be channelled into agricultural investments and must not be seen as playing passive role in national development, but must be approached from investments perspective more or less as a value chain. If examined from this broad spectrum, then agriculture would contribute to economic development in four ways: the product contribution of inputs for industry such as textiles and food processing, the foreign-exchange contribution of using agricultural export revenues to import capital equipment, the market contribution of rising rural incomes creating more demand for consumer products, and the factor market contribution (Kuznets in Todaro and Smith, 2011).

Agricultural Value Chain: Solving Niger Delta Youth Unemployment Problem

It is imperative to note that only investment in agricultural value chain can provide the needed development in the Niger Delta region. Agricultural value chain means converting a single agricultural produce to several agricultural products that produce economic chain effects. This is the kind of investment that bestows economic values to agricultural produce, provides raw materials for agro industries and also boosts economic wellbeing of the people through a chain employment creation process. A single produce say cassava can provide *garri* for human food consumption, flour for bread making, starch for dry cleaners, and raw material for livestock, poultry and fish feeds etc. In every stage of these processes, jobs are created, leading to the economic wellbeing of the people, and substantial poverty reduction process. As a chain process of production, agricultural value chain creates a production linking process, through its multiplier effects and stimulates investment in agricultural activities.

Table 3: Investments Opportunities in Local Agricultural Value Chain

| State | Local Government Area (s) | Investments Opportunities in Local Agricultural Value Chain |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Akwa Ibom | Abak, Mkpata Enin, Onna Eastern Obolo, Oron, Ibeno | Palm oil/ cassava value chain/ Aquaculture value chain |
| Abia State | Isiala Ngwa, Umuhia, Bende | Palm oil/cassava/poultry value chain |
| Bayelsa State | Nembe, Brass, Akassa | Aquaculture value chain |
| Cross River State | Akampa, Ikom | Yam/cassava/plantain value chain |
| Delta State | Asaba, Agbor | Palm oil cassava/Poultry value chain |
| | Warri | Aquaculture value chain |
| Edo State | Edo North | Yam/cassava/plantain/banana value chain |
| | Ovia | Palm oil/aquaculture value chain |
| | Ekpoma | Rice value chain |
| | Benin | Poultry value chain |
| River State | Andoni, Okrika Ikwerre/Etche | Aquaculture value chain Cassava/plantain/banana/palm oil value chain |
| | Gokona | Plantain/banana/aquaculture value |
| Imo State | Nkwerre, Mbaise, Mbano, Owerri | Palm oil/cassava/poultry value chain |
| Ondo State | Ondo/Owo/Akure East/Akoko Akoko North East/North West Okeitipupa | Cocoa value chain Aquaculture |

Source: Field survey, 2016

Relationship between Communication and Development

Communication as a concept has many definitions; some of the definitions were earlier stated in this work. Communication is any means by which a taught, feeling, idea or knowledge is transferred

from one person to another. “Communication is not just the giving of information; it is the giving of understandable information and receiving an understandable message, it is the transferring of message to another party so that it can be understood and acted upon” (Eyre, 1983) cited in Ate (2008, p.2). On the other hand, development can be seen as gradual growth of something into its advance stage. Development can also be seen as an improvement in the total wellbeing of a people. Rodney (1976) defines development thus:

Development in human society is many sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self- discipline, responsibility and material well- being .A society develops economically as its members increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment. This capacity for dealing with the environment is dependent on the extent to which they understand the laws of nature (science), on the extent of which they put that understanding into practice by devising tools (technology), and on the manner in which work is organized (p.11).

Development in every human society is a deliberate planned effort at empowering a greater number of people. It is usually a participatory effort aimed at eradicating poverty and ensuring positive social change. Uwakwe (2003) sees development as widely participatory process of directed social change in a society intended to bring about social and material advancement including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities for the majority of people through their gaining greater control over environment. Development in the modern society does not occur on its own but it is usually transfer through communication. Okunna (2002,p.293) argues that “communication is closely interconnected with development, that there can be no development without communication”. Supporting Okunna’s assertion, Nwodu (2002) cited in Ate (2008) outline some of the roles of communication in development, thus:

Creating a climate of development by adequately informing the people and encouraging them to embrace positive changes that can enhance their well-being, encouraging people to aim high as well as developing new taste to the point of desiring good things in life; focusing people’s attention to developmental process thereby sensitizing their maximum participation in development effort. Helping the people to understand and appreciate government policies meant to enhance their living conditions (p.19).

Action Points that will Improve and Sustain the Economic Empowerment of Niger Delta Youths through Agricultural Investments.

- Development can only take place where there is peace. Absence of peace is the beginning of underdevelopment. This vital point is eminent for effective planning for agricultural development to take place in the Niger Delta region. Therefore, it is important for communication experts who intend to disseminate agricultural messages to Niger Delta

youths to know that, first and foremost, youths in the region must realize that development starts with peace and must be ready to embrace it.

- Agricultural information should be well articulated bearing in mind that development communication entails well desired and articulated communication aimed at bringing development to the knowledge of the target.
- The articulated communication must also seek to re-orient the youths, that is, change their perception of agriculture from a peasantry endeavour to a business endeavour.
- State and Federal Government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and multinationals must set aside reasonable amount of money to support agricultural initiatives and encourage youths to embrace agriculture.
- The government should also create enabling laws that would attract foreign and private sector investment in local agricultural value chains that would provide income and employment generations opportunities.
- The government should also provide adequate funding to the existing agriculture research centres with proper evaluation mechanism to checkmate fraud.
- State and Federal Government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and multinationals should also identify specific niches and opportunities in selected local agricultural value chains in each state of the Niger Delta to attract more youths.
- State and Federal Government, Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and Multinationals should be ready to assist youths with credit facilities at concessionary single digit interest rate.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study is drawn from the reviewed literature basically. Communication is seen as a vital force for a total transformation of any given society. It must convey understandable messages that elicit response (feedback) from the target. Such response must be in line with the desire (purpose) of the communicator. When the purpose of communication is achieved, such communication is said to be effective and impactful. Only impactful communication can guarantee social change (such as youth acceptance of agricultural investment opportunities in the Niger Delta). Therefore, it is expected that a development communicator saddled with the responsibility to disseminate agricultural investment information to Niger Delta youths should be well-informed not only on the subject matter but also about the target social system and about the possible solution to the social problem identified.

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