

CONTRIBUTIONS OF VARIOUS KENYAN PERSONALITIES IN COMMUNICATING CHANGE FOR TRANSFORMATIVE COMMUNITY

Rebecca Ng'ang'a

Department of Communication, Daystar University, P.O. Box 44400, Nairobi, Kenya

ABSTRACT: *In spite of relatively stable governance and a hard working population, Kenya is rated among the countries with wide income disparities. Extreme and chronic poverty has not been eliminated even after fifty years of development efforts, that is, since the country gained its independence in 1963. In mitigating the adverse effects of these inequalities, communication is considered an essential tool for transformation through which essential thoughts in the minds of the people aimed at transformation are nurtured and shared. The purpose of this study was to identify the contributions made by various Kenyan personalities whose life experiences are shared in this paper, in communication change for a transformative society. The study displays how the select Kenyans engaged with the people and got them involved in transforming their community. A qualitative research design was adopted to select ten Kenyans to share their life experiences through in-depth interviews that were used by the author to gather data. Data analysis focused on the participants' narratives on the aspect of their personal contributions and how they got the community working towards sustainable change. The study also recommends development of an African Communication Theory on what motivates communicative acts that lead to societal transformation.*

KEYWORDS: Communication, Change, Transformation, Community, Contributions, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

In Kenya, the widespread culture of domination from the author's observation is manifested in deep-seated self-centeredness, the culture of accumulating things, and a preference for products from the West. For example, writing for the *Daily Nation* on Monday, February 24, 2014, the columnist (John Ngirachu) noted that leaders voted into parliament were accused of spending money meant for county development on personal aggrandizement and pleasure. Some County Assemblies' reports disclosed the use of funds for personal comfort instead of activities that would benefit the counties. Again the same paper reported the chair of the Finance and Economic Affairs Committee, Billow Kerrow, as having said that County Assemblies were spending heavily on non-priority areas such as the Governor's residence, entertainment, and foreign trips. Those areas received more financial allocation than key priority areas such as healthcare, education, water, and sanitation.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy of modern man is his domination by the force of these myths and his manipulation by organized advertising, ideologies or otherwise. Gradually, without even realizing the loss, he relinquishes his capacity for choice; he is expelled from the orbit of decisions. Ordinary men do not perceive the tasks of the time; the latter are interpreted by an "elite" and presented in the form of recipes of prescriptions. And when men try to save themselves by following the prescriptions, they drown in leveling anonymity, without hope and without faith, domesticated and adjusted (Freire, 1974, p. 5).

LITERATURE UNDERPINNING

According to Freire (1970), human beings cannot be human apart from communication, for they are essentially communicative creatures. The way communication appears to have inclined a majority of Kenyans to view the world has probably resulted in people characteristically seeking not only what benefits them as individuals, but also what engages the community (Nyong'o, 2007). Prof. Kinoti and Prof. Kimuyu gave the historical structure that forms the basis of the beliefs that guide communication among the people as follows:

As we consider the grave economic, political and social crises that Africa faces today, it is important to remember the vision and the faith of great Christian pioneers as Dr. David Livingstone . . . He devoted most of his life to exploring Africa with a view to opening the continent up to the Christian gospel, commerce and civilization, that is European education and culture. In the event, Africa did not benefit as much as Livingstone hoped because, for one she could not be an equal trading partner with the West. (Kinoti & Kimuyu, 1997, pp. 2-3).

According to Servaes (2008), communication is not confined to media messages, but it is interaction of people in an interpersonal relationship. The involvement of the people in defining issues, and coming up with programs that determine how to implement and evaluate them is what brings development. For example, Bruce Olson, though a foreigner in the community of the Motilone (Bari) people of Venezuela in South America, introduced change through the existing structures in a way that left their cultural expression and the interpretation of which they are intact (Olson, 1973). Olson engaged with Motilone people by taking great care to ensure that the dignity of the people is not undermined but preserved. He gives an illustration of how he went into great length to protect the community from shame by infecting his own eyes with 'pink' eye germs so as to preserve the dignity of the Motilone's medicine woman. Olson also exercised patience in seeking to gain the trust of the people by knowing their language and culture in addition to building the trust of individuals by using images and metaphors drawn from their folklore (Olson & Lund, 2006). The articulation of the transformative messages was done by the people who had learned to engage in communicative acts that were transformative. Today, the Motilone are an integrated, productive, positive, cultural force, able to accept new concepts and fight their own battles in addition to being connected to the rest of the world (Olson & Lund, 2006). Communicative acts engage people by facilitating them to problematize about their reality and coming up with relevant solutions. Transformation of a majority of the people is likely to result from engaging people in dialogue where they question how the past influences the present and the desired future. It is when a majority of the people are able to articulate and identify what in their systems, beliefs, assumptions, interpersonal relationships, history limits them, that they come with what is good for them. The county governments would then think through with the community members for the good of their county and the nation.

Communication is transmission that links people to the logic of domination that has inclined people to characteristically seek what would benefit them as individuals instead of what would not only be beneficial but also what would engage the community. Where hierarchies and inequalities are privileged, communication intended for development would reproduce the same hierarchies and inequalities thus retaining the income inequality gaps (Gurria, 2016; Harries, 2014; Tumisiime, 2009).

This study sought to gain insight from indigenous Kenyans whose roots could be traced to pre-independent times, and who have lived through the various transitions of leadership in the government. These are Kenyans who “sieved” through the educational system to the highest level, yet by some means have been able to overcome the consequences of living under a dominance paradigm and have genuinely engaged in working together with the people in transforming the community. The quest for this paper was to critically reflect on these Kenyans’ life experiences and establish how they communicated that which engaged others and was transformative.

MATERIALS and Methods

The study is underpinned on interpretivist paradigm’s assumptions, beliefs and values that are concerned with meaning and seeks to uncover the way society members understand given situation. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explained that in terms of epistemology, interpretivism is closely linked to constructivism. This study used a descriptive qualitative research design which allowed an understanding of what was fundamental knowledge in explaining the nature and shape of society (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lambert & Lambert, 2012). The rationale for using qualitative research was its focus on the constructivism approach to social reality, which locates individuals in the wider social, cultural and historical contexts they inhabit. The goal of the interpretive approach was to explicate meanings and concepts used by the participants in their settings.

Though Kenya has placed education as a priority at all levels, promoting it as a key indicator for social and economic development (Kinuthia, 2009), it was not possible to know the total number of people with university degrees. For example, though at the time of Kenyan independence, 1963, there were fewer than 900,000 children attending primary school (Kinuthia, 2009), the possibility of knowing how many of those children ended up in the universities in the country or outside the country was nil. Some people who dropped out of school in form four, followed different paths and they ended up in the university. The people that were interviewed were those who went through the education system yet they were involved in the community in what was transformative and beneficial. The study interviewees were chosen by observation, reading and listening to people whose contributions were intriguing. The sample size was therefore purposively selected and included: Rev. Dr. Timothy Njoya who had been deeply engaged in having Kenyans participate in tabling the new constitution; Prof. George Kinoti is the author of *Hope for Africa* (1994) and co-author of *Vision for a brighter Africa* (1997) in which he expresses his deep concern for the development of Africa, Ambassador Bethuel Abdul Kiplagat a diplomat and a member of the Panel of Eminent Persons of New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) who had schooled with Prof. Kinoti hence the connection; Prof. Peter Anyang’ Nyong’o who had often been cited in journals of development communication; Mrs. Jane Njeru who had an outstanding interest and investment in people; while Prof. Julia Ojiambo, Prof. Miriam Were, Ambassador Tabitha Seii, Dr. Edwin Muinga Chokwe and Dr. Eddah Gachukia were recommended by colleagues who have interest in development communication.

One reason for choosing indigenous Kenyans was to gain an inside knowledge of a people who somehow have to justify their claims. To get the gist of being indigenous, this is what the renowned anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski, wrote as foreword to Jomo Kenyatta wrote *Facing Mount Kenya*, in 1938:

When a German, Briton write, there is no debate as to whether an educated and a trained member of a community is entitled to observe with profit and confidence. Yet when an African writes a book about his own tribe, it seems almost necessary to justify his claims. (Kenyatta, 1938, p. viii).

Another reason for purposive selection of indigenous Kenyans was that for seventy years (1890-1963), the British influenced the indigenous people's perspective on most aspects of life. One particular influence was the limiting of education of indigenous Kenyans to mere practical skills, suitable for working on the farms (Gatimu, 2009; Ndirangu, 2009), active modernization of the colonies that started in 1952 (Mefalopulos, 2008; Waisbord, 2001) and historical conditioning, including discrimination and differing laws based on the cultural roots of the people. These are some of the factors that make the indigenous population distinct from others. The other reason for selecting indigenous Kenyans is the belief that "there remains in many African nations a cultural sense of communication that has never been far from the surface" (Okigbo & Eribo, 2004, p. 5). The study population then was of Kenyans whose beliefs, values, and ideas, could be traced to the time before active modernization started being effected in the country. They were Kenyans who have had formal education to the highest level, preferably PhD, but at least a degree, and have, either in their writing or actions, demonstrated interest in community well-being.

To understand the motivation of those who have engaged their community in communicative acts that met their community in communicative acts that met their communities' development needs, qualitative research was used. In adopting research methods in development communication in Africa, attention has to be paid to the continent's fundamental cultural diversities and specific experiences (Nyamnjoh, 2010). This study sought an understanding that could not be quantified, aware that "conventional quantitative techniques of data collection are not always adapted to the realities of Africa" (Nyamnjoh, 2010, p. 11). The goal of the study was to obtain insights into the contributions made by individuals through transformative communication by listening to their personal experiences through life story interviews. The assumption was that lives cannot be lived in isolation from other people or from social, cultural, historical and natural events, movements, trends and values in the world at large.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Each individual story was unique and brought out some aspects of their motivation in relation to communicative acts that could lead to development. Gachukia recommended sensitivity to gender considerations and use of the first language of the child (vernacular) in their first years of learning, which would boost the child's esteem and help him or her grasp concepts in his or her language without any barrier. Ojiambo said that trustworthiness, love for her people and her country, ability to listen to the people, persistence, and desire to be a continuous learner and remaining on course are skills necessary for modeling development. Prof. Were is a learner who has used the scientific approach to observe and facilitate the community to see for themselves and come up with possible solutions. She believed in people's ability to think critically about their situation and make the necessary choice to change. Her key contribution in what she considered as necessary for communication that would lead to development is to re-establish the community. According to her, the community approach is better than empowering women which could end up causing conflict in the community. All three women

gained the status of professorship because of their continued learning, engaging the community and publishing their findings (Freire, 1970; Smith, 2003; Smith, 1999; Woodson, 2006).

Kiplagat perceived development as the outcome of transformed thinking where people look for information that supports their actions. In his macro and micro approach, he has engaged in peace missions that looked at the basic values of a country, the rule of law, levels of corruption and measures being taken to alleviate poverty. As a result of his skills which involved working with others, there has been relative peace in Africa for the last three decades. Though the absence of coups could be due to other factors beyond the scope of this study, Kiplagat said that the peer review committee which he is a member of had played a role. Using Singapore as an example, he brought out the possibility of separating politics from the development agenda.

Nyong'o who identified the conflict between democracy based on popularity and what is best for the total community was also concerned about abdication of thinking by the community. He reckoned that development would be possible through creation of democratic space. Njoya was of the view that development was tied to people's way of thinking. He said that phenomena like inequality arises due to historical context and man-made communication patterns that have established and produced a mind-set that leaves people as objects to be manipulated. He believed that selfhood, a term similar to Freire's (1978) 'the soul of a culture of people' cannot be destroyed by changes. Selfhood and indigenization are prerequisite to people's engagement with their reality if they are going to seek ways of altering it.

According to Kinoti's observation, the quality of values that people live by influences their communication. That is what probably led him to organize workshops and facilitate students to consider serving in the church. Kiplagat, Nyong'o, Kinoti and Njoya appeared to be dissatisfied with the paradigm, in which their people seemed trapped, yet their communication worked within the system and they sought how to transform it. Muinga was somehow dissatisfied with the fact that although his people were among the first to be exposed to Western education and Christianity, they have not experienced substantial development. His desire would be to see his people, the Rabai, transformed and be like other people, and not so held back by traditions and witchcraft, that they are unable to be part of transformation. He considered himself as the biblical Moses, born to bring deliverance to his community. Unlike Muinga though, Seii's engagement was with a people who desired change but lacked the know-how and the resources to arrive at their desired goal. To her, change is an influence which would encourage team spirit that is necessary for transformation.

However, both Muinga and Seii seemed to be guided by a clear understanding of the conflict arising from the use of elective politics as a means to influence policies that could bring development. They both appeared to be unassuming when it came to the possibility of being "rejected" by the very people they thought they were serving. But that notwithstanding, they continued undeterred to pursue communicative acts that would lead to transformation. Their stories are similar to people that have had what Nyong'o (2007) called an inner star that guides them and so they could remain focused even when there is opposition (Lee, 2000; Maathai, 2008; Mandela, 1995). The end result are communicative acts that have led to what was beneficial for a majority of the people.

Njeru's love and commitment to godly values served as the stimulus of her worldview. Her reflective thinking has led to her selfless living, giving and caring for what was best for people. One remarkable observation was love of people that propelled her to give almost all she had to make others live dignified lives. She has modeled a lifestyle that has engaged people and

communicated love. Njeru and Seii were of the view that communication that would lead to development has both individual and team aspects. There seemed to be the “least of these” attitude, as it were, that implied that no one should be ignored in the communication process unlike the trickle down communication theory in which some learn so as to teach others.

Several of the participants, namely Njeru, Seii, Ojiambo, Were, Muinga, Njoya, Kinoti and Kiplagat saw development as primarily engagement of one person at a time. This is because they considered development as an assignment that individuals undertake. This view is in contradistinction with Carey’s (1989) theory of communication which sees people as passive objects that should adapt to their environment. According to these participants, development should not be taught but should be caught as the source lives out the values that continuously encourage others. Development communication is passionate living that empowers individual imagination of people. It is living out and communicating values that are so internalized and done unconsciously.

From what has been set out in the foregoing, it seems reasonable to conclude that development can be modeled without the top-down structured communication of a modernization paradigm that mixes the concept of development with Westernization and also ignores internal sources of change in societies (Mefalopulos, 2008; Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Servaes, 2008; Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009; Waisbord, 2001). The participants’ modeling started by having a vision of desired change, and then engaged in communicative acts that made the internalized beliefs become a reality. There was a sense of integration that made people to see their every action as an indispensable part of the whole (Mandela, 1995). In the view of the participants listed above, development communication is not a “trickled down” approach to social change that inclines people to aspire to climb the ladder rather than engage in what would bring transformation to the community.

The common theme from people that were impacted by the participants was how the lifestyles of the participants were a message in and of itself. Professor Kimuyu and Bishop Adoyo recalled how Professor Kinoti’s presence in the Christian Union had an impact on them, which would suggest that Kinoti modeled what were to be a lecturer and a Christian. The same was noted by Mbugua and Njoroge about Rev. Njoya, who would come to their level and engage with them. Both Mbugua and Njoroge explained that Rev. Njoya’s lifestyle communicated effectively on how to engage others in what was good for the majority. Freire and Macedo (1987) argued that to problematize, in a way that communicants are able to see for themselves requires love, patience, and humility, which are evident in the study participants. Hon Kilimo and Tarus were unequivocal about how Ambassador Seii’s lifestyle of love and selflessness has endeared her to them and left in them the desire to serve others. Pastor Munene and the Kinyuas talked of Mrs. Njeru’s life as a model of love, care and sacrificial giving.

From what the people impacted said of those whose lives have had a positive impact on them, it was clear that the participants did not impose their views on them, neither did they use power or coercion to get them involved in what was transformative. Underpinning all this was a picture of respect, love, care, selflessness, and humility in a way that they did not sacrifice the dignity of the participants (Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987).

The impact of a people whose mental orientation was to bring change might be difficult to quantify, hence the qualitative nature of this study. Some of the participants could trace their engagement with community to their preteen years. While in primary school, Njeru would share her food with pupils that she felt were disadvantaged. Ojiambo and Nyong’o were student

leaders in high school and university respectively. Since the participants linked their communication to what mattered to people and enhanced their interpersonal relationships, their impact was difficult to situate in a particular place. This goes to suggest that it is the person with a transformative mindset who is likely to seek opportunities to interact with others and in so doing, initiate transformative ideas.

Implication to Research and Practice

This paper looks into the significant contributions made by different individuals in transforming society through communicative development. This study provides insights into what motivates people to engage in transformative communicative acts with long-term benefits for the whole community. The community members who have an interest in being part of their own transformation would understand the ideas and views of how to interpret their histories differently as subjects and not just objects for whom things are done. They would gain a model of communication that would enable them to understand the connections between their story and communication leading to development.

The realization that it is possible to indigenize and excel by identifying the foundational values that rhyme with the people and then learning how to learn from others without losing one's ground is liberative. It is possible to have communicative acts that are integrative, engaging others and dynamic irrespective of the system one is working and living in.

CONCLUSION

In addition, interpersonal communication skills enabled the participants to have an awareness of their role as participants in relationships with others where all communicants were valid. To be valid is what Freire (1970) referred to as to be present, which transcended just being represented. Rather, everyone's voice or opinion is listened to and acted on according to the issue under consideration. The participants had a continuous balancing of tension caused by opposing needs. It requires patience with people while seeking for the information as a part of a growing society. The participants were readers who kept up to date with the happenings in the world around them and at the same time toiled with the masses while seeking votes to go to parliament. The need to gain control and have some degree of predictability while at the same time recognizing the need for dialogue and novelty is the balance that is necessary for communication that results in development. Those whose communicative acts bring forth engagement of a majority of the people in what is beneficial to them need time and some kind of reflection and solitude spent in observation and data gathering while at the same time spending time listening and conversing with the people.

Future Research

The findings of this study are from people who had a strong family foundation that encouraged them to achieve success as prescribed by their community, it would be worthwhile to study other people who are communicating in ways that engage others in what is development from unsupportive backgrounds other than those represented in this study.

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