EXPEDITIOUS RURAL COMMUNICATION PROGRAMME AS A CATALYST TO THE EMERGENCE OF NIGERIA'S SOCIO-POLITICAL INTEGRATION.

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ABSTRACT

The impact of communication on Nigerian modern development has been pervasive, this paper thus wishes to consider expeditious rural communication programme as it affects socio-cultural, economic and political aspects of Nigerian development. This is because expeditious rural communication will allow people to make judicious use of facilities in their localities. It will also bring about the necessary changes in peoples’ attitudes towards material development. A new concept is thus expected to emerge from the rank and file of rural dwellers. This will lead to an enduring attitudinal change, which is a function of learning and understanding brought about by receiver-oriented content of communication. That is, exchange of ideas in a reciprocal and interactive environment based on, not feedback that helps the source to fortify its strategy in order to ‘win’ but feedback that helps the source to appreciate where the receiver is coming from and makes him to see the need to help the receiver (at the receiver’s pace and within his contexts) to reach a rational decision.

Expeditions rural communication therefore is an indispensable tool that has a very important role to play in rural development and transformation. This will therefore lead to the emergence of the long awaited socio-political and economic integration of the country.

1. INTRODUCTION

The impact of communication on Nigerian modern development has been pervasive. However, this paper wishes to consider expeditious rural communication programme as it affects socio-cultural, economic and political aspects of Nigeria’s development. How can expeditious rural communication programme brings about economic and socio-political integration of various groups in a multi cultural environment like ours? This is the main thrust of this paper.

The pattern and the speed of Christian Missionary activity has closely been associated with expansion of communication. It is the major determinant of the relative distribution of educational facilities and the spread of education in the country. As far back as 1980 Ukwu identified these facts in his study titled “Transport and Communications as Factors in the Modernization and Development of Nigeria.”
major spurt in the 30s, which followed in the wake of national linkage of the railway system. As local communication and transport networks developed linking localities, communities begin to redefine themselves and their relationships with other communities, often in terms of a hierarchy of regional relationship – from village to local, zonal and regional centres cutting across traditional, ethnic or political structures.

This process was therefore accelerated by the tendency for the new communication networks to radiate from the new administrative centres and for route densities to fall off at the boundaries of the administrative units. Ukwu (1980) thus rightly claimed that the impact of communication is seen most dramatically in the pattern of export-crop production in the country. The groundnut and cotton farms of the Sudan belt were established along the railway line while the railway towns of the Southeast collected most of the palm produce. In the Southwest, the motor road led to the expansion of cocoa cultivation and timber exploitation. We all know that until the end of the sixties, export crops were the main foreign exchange earner in the country, giving the producing areas higher level of income financial and managerial infrastructures and general economic development than the less favoured areas. Communication on its own right thus constitutes a major sector of the country’s economy, contributing 2.8% of GNP in 1975 and having important linkages with other sectors. Why have we not been able to sustain this? It is because we neglected our concern for expeditious rural communication network at a particular point in time. This was when Nigeria went into the oil business and agriculture was pushed to the background. The need for expeditious rural communication programme is thus considered in the next paragraphs.
2. NEED FOR EXPEDITIOUS RURAL COMMUNICATION PROGRAMME

The principal occupation in the country is farming though Nigeria is also rich in minerals especially crude oil, gold etc. There is abundant fishing in the lake and riverine areas and along the coast. But despite the volume of corporate mining and agriculture the basic way of life is farming (particularly in the rural areas). In many cases - subsistence farming, but while agriculture volume may be high, we all know that the actual productivity per hectre is below average, hence, the need for improved farming techniques and the use of the media to reach the farmers through expeditious rural communication programme. There is therefore the need to establish rural broadcasting.

Though it is obvious that rural programmes alone would not solve basic problems of organisation, adult education, complicated instructions in farming techniques and group cooperation at village level for Radio had to do more than broadcast it has to reach out to the people (Schirato et al 2000:17). The organization of forum which will invite villages to voice and discuss their problems and which will encourage participation in village affairs is therefore long overdue and is hereby being recommended.

The forum will also provide a means for identifying the villagers' interests in the decision making process at the centre (a form of policy as a social process instead of policy as a prescription). In addition the forum will provide an important social occasion for the rural areas. The project if properly handled can undertake the following activities:

(a) Dissemination of visual aids and printed programme guides based on the theme of the coming broadcast

(b) Broadcast of the programmes

(c) Organising group discussions
(d) Organising group actions
(e) Feedback reports and evaluation.

To achieve all these field organizers which will comprise of extension workers from agricultural and social work offices will go round the villages and with the help of local chiefs and elders explain the objectives of the forum to the people. With the field organiser, the people will then set out about electing officers (Chairman and the Secretary) and prepare a place for group listening. But it should be noted that this rural communication programme must not be intended only for a specific time period in Nigeria's development but must be a dynamic one. The changes that a forum will have to go through must be envisaged so that the broadcasting techniques and styles must adapt accordingly, but whose role will it be to organise, finance and manage the rural communication gadgets? This question must be properly addressed by this conference.

However, I am of the opinion that forum work should be the role of the production unit, an agricultural extension agency and a coordinated activity of other several concerned sectors.

The awareness of the need for the participation of the people in the discussions and decisions concerning their development problems, brought to the fore the need for an expeditious communication strategy that would create easily accessible channels for the rural population. Experts all along have been recommending for a restructuring of the mass media from strictly vertical or horizontal models to interactive models, in sum we must decentralize the mass media in order to make them easily available to the rural population, and in order to bring about meaningful development. This will stimulate paying sufficient attention to how the mass media can foster mobilization for
development purposes, to how the audience can control the mass media institutions through effective receiver-oriented feedback; and to the role of the mass media in not further widening but conspicuously narrowing the gap between the urban and the rural areas of the country. The following areas could also be targeted:

- Nutrition
- Health
- Sanitation including how to rear domestic animals hygienically.

If the rural areas were fully involved in this type of communication strategy we would be able to avoid the ‘goat war’ that reared its ugly head in Ondo State during the administration of Bamidele Otiko (Governor of Ondo State during Buhari regime). The people of Ondo State particularly the Ekitis who were part of Ondo State then, were ready to fight even with their blood to protect their domestic animals from being ‘arrested’ and taken away by sanitation officials who believed the system of rearing domestic animals openly was not hygienic enough. As noted by BBC recently and cited from Moemaka (2001: 29)

*The strength of local radio lies in the way it can relate to aspects of local life for at its best, local radio is the community talking to itself.*

Expeditious rural communication will then allow people to make judicious use of facilities in their localities. It will also bring about the necessary changes in people’s attitudes towards national development. A new concept will thus emerge from the rank and file of the rural dwellers. There will be an enduring attitudinal change which is a function of learning and understanding brought about by receiver-oriented content of
communication i.e. exchange of ideas in a reciprocal and interactive environment and based on, not feedback that helps the source to fortify his strategy in order to ‘win’ but feedback that helps the source to appreciate where the receiver is coming from and makes him to see the need to help the receiver (at the receiver’s pace and within his contexts) reach a rational decision. A World Bank Report of 1999 remarked:

\[ \text{In spite of the considerable efforts made by developing countries, about half of their citizens, children and adults alike are without a minimum level of education and without sufficient level of development information.} \]

The reasons for this disheartening remark are not far to seek because in the first instance, the general appeal structure of the programmes did create problems. Very little attention is often paid to the content of the media message vis-à-vis the social cultural peculiarities and specific needs of the different communities to which the programmes are directed. On the lighter side, this appears not to be the problem in this country alone but the general trend in the third world for Barghouti (1998) did find in Jordan that rural development messages provided very little specific rural information. In addition, many of these projects didn’t go beyond the pilot states, but even where they did, those who benefited from the results were very few in comparison with the total population of the rural areas that required such educational projects.

McAnany (1999) cited the impact of educational television in Samao, Niger, Colombia, Mexico and Brazil which widened rather than bridged socio-economic and political gaps, though the project improved training and provided certification, these benefits went to the high socio-economic groups within the relevant communities. The project brought no profound changes in socio-economic and political structures of the rural communities concerned. Yet this programme is supposed to act as catalyst in
bringing about changes which would bridge the socio-economic and political gaps between urban-educated and advantaged groups and the improvised-disease prone illiterate and disadvantaged rural communities.

Expeditious rural communication therefore is an indispensable tool that has a very important role to play in rural development. It will surely lead to the emergence of socio-political and economic integration of the country – a role that could not be overlooked with serious repercussions, but the population must actively participate in discussions in order to achieve desired results.

Rogers (1997: 69) remarked

*Unless a communication strategy includes a two-way flow of message, make sure that the rural people have access to adequate channels and can express themselves in freedom and unless authorities are willing to listen to the messages which come from the country side to learn from them 'best' of such strategies will come to naught.*

As a result of this, eradication of ignorance which is a major cause of rural underdevelopment cannot be achieved through flooding the rural communities with directives in the form of news information created, prepackaged by ‘strangers’ who knew next to nothing about the real living conditions and the social cultural contexts of the rural people.

Combs and Ahmed (1974) (cf Moemeka 1998) have also pointed out that the complex process of rural transformation (in this sense emergence of social political integration of the country) must begin with changes in the people themselves. That is, in their attitudes towards change, in their aspiration for improvement and above all in their perception of themselves and their own inherent power to better themselves individually and collectively. Hence, all emphasis on rural development must steadily shift from
publicity and information to expeditious and effective communication i.e. from talking at and to the people to the exchange of ideas and information between the educated and socio-economically advantaged urban populations and the uneducated, sickly and socio-economically deprived rural populations. In this approach participation i.e. (democratization of information) has therefore been identified as an indispensable element in rural communication.

Participation should be the key characteristics of the new development paradigm. This holds that development programme should be planned to improved socio-political integration of the country, which, will at the end of the day improve the quality of life for specific individuals and here the planning and implementation of the community programmes should be carried out with the people. Elements of this new approach as recommended and identified by Rogers (1997) include

1. Equality of distribution of information and socio-economic benefits.
2. Popular participation in self development planning and
3. Execution usually accompanied by the decentralization of some of these activities to the village level.

Rural communication could therefore be established to aim at literacy retention, further education, mobilizing the rural population to effecting social, political, cultural and economic development that is necessary for socio-political integration.
3. CONCLUSION

What we intend to gain with this entire programme is the necessary change which is a transformation from one state to another. Change can be for the better or for the worse, probably this is why many people including rural dwellers do not feel at ease or comfortable with the concept. People therefore prefer the concept development, which always implies positive and advantageous transformation or modification. Development is analogous to improvement because one may be underdeveloped but one cannot develop backwards or downwards.

Change, however, is also usually discussed on the positive side – a transformation of existing conditions to something better or subjective transformations as well as modifications that take place within the individual and concern internal psychological processes. The former is usually referred to by social scientists as social change and the latter as attitudinal change. Rural communication must be concerned with both. Focus should be on change of attitude from total dependence on traditional methods of doing things to more health sustaining or integrative practices based on rational judgement.

It is however credible to argue here that in building national institutions, the problem of unity has led to the development strategies which continue to affect the mode of political development. One major method of coping, has been the attempt to develop important organisations, which reflect the national character of the Federation. Thus for example, people carefully chosen to this end head ministries. Another strategy was to require political parties to be national in scope. Thus the struggle for power and the need to maintain unity has led to the development of certain approaches in the building of
national integration. The end result of this suggestion is a fundamental transformation of not only the rural areas but also all aspects of society.

In conclusion communication provides access to political and social integration. How such access is utilized for development or for exploitation depends on the distribution of economic and political power and the pattern of decisions made.

The new communication strategy e.g. a new highway from the city to the village may accelerate the drift of youth to the city or flood the village with cheap city bread, closing down the local bakery. But it may also make possible viable working of the rural clay for the construction industry establishment or engineering workshops to service the farms. Communication policy must therefore be set in the total context of economic development.
REFERENCES


