

COMMUNICATION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

BY

EZEKIEL GAYA BEST. PH.D AND GUIPIYEM G. GUIPIYEM

INTRODUCTION

Social life is only meaningful in the context of communication. Through communication, individual express their feelings, frustrations, excitement and the like. Communication takes a more meaningful dimension when different cultures are involved. In this case the individual cultures could communicate within their cultures and at the same time communicate inter culturally. Communication in Nigeria at the National level is a good case in point. English as a medium or language is used to reach out to as many members of the population as possible.

One can argue that man is communication and communication is man. Language, art and interaction are important components of human existence. Through culture, man communicates his uniqueness to other cultures. Through communication also individuals get their wishes done. The next part of this paper tries to give a working definition of communication. This will be followed by a discussion of the linkage between communication development. This third part of the paper examines development in detail. Suggestions are given on how to achieve a more meaningful development by the year 2010 through communication.

COMMUNICATION DEFINED

Generally speaking, communication involves the sending of messages out. Sometimes these messages require a response and other time a response is not necessary. In reality, however, all communications require some form of response. In this sense, one cannot truly conceive of some communication that does not require a response.

Communication touches on every aspect of human activity. James et al (1990:2) has argued that communication informs all of man's actions because it is occasioned by man's needs to interact with his fellow man. Furthermore, that it serves as an instrument of social interaction. It helps us to understand ourselves, to keep in touch with other people, to understand them and to predict their response to situations.

Another view of communication is one that sees it as describing situations where messages flow between institutions, people, and media to the rural areas with or without feedback (Hedebro, 1982:4). The assumption here is that most communication originate from urban areas.

A working definition for the purpose of this paper will conceive of communication using the mass media to reach out to a larger population, usually residing in rural areas. Communication is seen as messages usually sent out from the core (urban areas and seat of Government) to urban and rural areas. The paper will later examine whether responses are received.

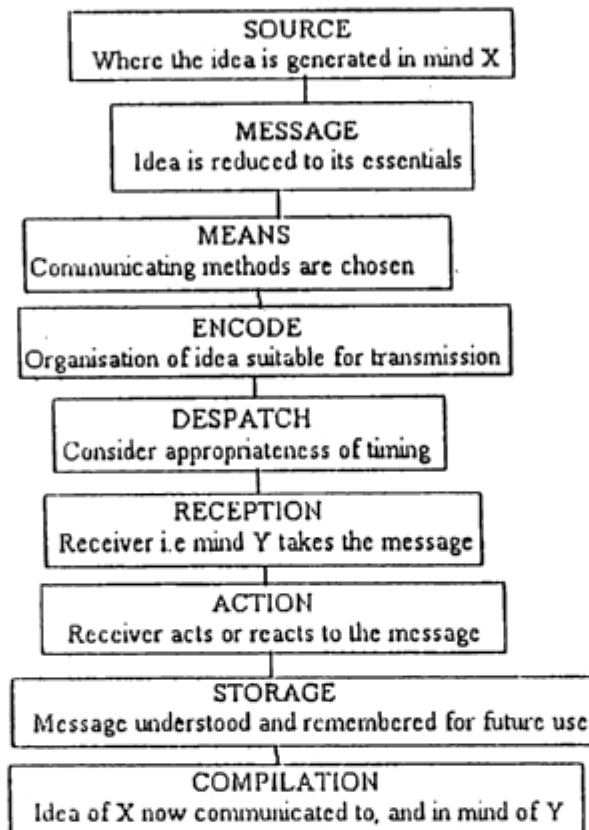
THE PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

There are processes involved in communication. An individual may have a very good idea to improve the generality of society. This must be relayed in a way that it is understood as such. Bergin (1982:2) has observed that because of the lack of a proper understanding of the principles and process of communication, many a good idea has never travelled beyond the mind of his creator. In his opinion that when we talk of communicating we talk of the transmission of information in its widest sense. Furthermore, that we consider

messages, facts, ideas and opinions as well as feelings and emotions, some of which we indicate to others without ever realising we are doing so.

James et al (1990:4) also argues that the communication process involves actions, reactions, and interactions. Bergin (1982:2) further opined that although men are individuals and are unique, they must live and work with others. In doing so, man makes daily use of the process of communication. This he graphically presents in fig. 1.

Fig 1: The Process of Communication



Source: Bergin, F (1982) Practical Communication, London: Pitman Books, p. 2.

James et al (1990:5) give a further illustration of the process of communication. They liken it to a kindergarten swing on which a child sits and which once given an initial push continues swinging to and fro as long as there is enough momentum left in it. This is the manner in which a conversation or any other communication encounter develops and continues. Communication that will bring about change and National development will involve this swinging back and forth in terms of message between the senders (in this case the initiators of development) and the respondents (in this case the receivers of development initiative). We shall now look at the interrelationship between communication and development.

COMMUNICATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Development involves changes in social, political, economic and physical structures of man that bring about qualitative and quantitative change. The whole idea about development is man not satisfied with his present condition and always looking for new ways to improve it. At the National level, development should result in overall improvement in the quality of life and Gross National Product (GNP).

There is a view that development cannot take place without adequate communication. Nwosu, (1990:73) has argued that before we can meaningfully employ communication (modern and traditional) in rural development efforts, we must first adequately develop them. Furthermore, that any country that is serious about rural development it should actually start by ensuring that its traditional and modern communication media are well developed. This could partly be because through the mass media, a large number of people can be reached at the same time. Electronic media penetrates some rural areas that may not be accessed physically and easily.

A prominent feature of Third World countries is the concentration of the mass media in urban areas. Hedebro (1982:116-117) agrees with this and further notes that this is where the educated groups live, where the highest number of literates is found, where the money is. He also observed that rural areas generally have a much poorer mass media structure. That if the aim is to promote development in the rural areas, change is required.

Development is about change and change must be communicated. When there is development and change has taken place, this is also communicated back in the forms of standards or quality of life. This response also allows one to see what is still not done and hence the need for further improvement. Either way, communication is central and important. When the wrong message is communicated, the desired development response may not be received. When the wrong response is communicated, it can also affect the adequate measure or assessment of what actual change has taken place.

DEVELOPMENT AS A PROCESS

There are many dimensions to development. It is also true that various development processes describe different dimensions of the overall structural transformation of a poor country into a rich one. Single dimensions of the overall transformation such as industrialization or urbanization are used to symbolize the whole set of development processes. It is, however, more useful to consider these dimensions as separate processes of change, since they may grow at different rates even though all are highly correlated.

Adnan, et al (1991:56) have observed that development is a multi-dimensional process in which the non-economic dimensions are at least as important as the economic dimensions. It entails the simultaneous achievement of a number of objectives such as growth and equity. Social groups that were previously passive now insist on participating actively in the development process, and sharing equitably in the fruits of productivity.

Commenting on development as a process Suld and Tyson (1978) quoted in Adnan et al (1991:6) observed that:

Development is an historical process through which human beings choose and create their future within the context of their environment to achieve a humanist and creative society. It is concerned with the dignity of the individual, a secure level of self-esteem, and the establishment of institutions appropriate for these ends. Development is a process whose goals are to realize the human being and whose success hinges upon the satisfaction of those goals.

Ahmed and Combs (1971:13) have observed that until recently, rural development was considered almost synonymous with agricultural output, and rising statistics of farm production were seen as the prime indicators of rural progress. But a new and broad vision of what rural development means is now evolving and replacing this simplistic view.

In the developing countries, especially Nigeria rural communication is still very low. For the rural poor to lose less and gain more requires reversals: spatial reversals in where professionals live and work, and decentralization of resources and discretion, reversals in professional values and preferences, from a 'first' to a 'last' list and reversals in specialization, enabling the identification and exploitation by and for the poor of gaps-under-recognized resources (Chambers, 1983:168).

TOWARD INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH COMMUNICATION

One of the greatest challenges for the twenty first century for Nigeria is to develop a communication network that effectively links the rural and urban areas. Dakur and Gupiyem (1997:11) have suggested that this can be achieved through the refashioning of rural communities by making them meaningful to their inhabitants through effective information services. Furthermore, that information has the power to level some of the inequalities in National development in any society. It can improve the quality of lives of rural inhabitants and enrich their democratic participation. Rural communication and National development can only be attained when information to the rural dwellers involves ways to improve their farming lots, health care system, political participation and involvement in all schemes of things undertaken by the Government. The following suggestion will be useful if Nigeria is to attain meaningful rural development by the year 2010.

- a. There is need to develop an effective rail system Nationwide. This has a major advantage of reducing prices of foodstuff and also opening up rural Nigeria for tourists.
- b. There is a need to develop road highway that will link up all State Capitals in the Country. This will compliment rail and air transportation. It will also enhance communication through mails.
- c. The mass media should be developed to allow each State be accessible through radio and television. This has a time advantage and also cuts off the many intermediaries that could interfere with messages from the Centre to the peripheries of State and the Country at large.
- d. The World is going electronic. To link up the Country to the 'global village' there is also need to fully develop the electricity potential of the country to allow for a more steady supply of electricity in urban and rural areas. This will make it possible for electronic linkage through E-mail and similar medium.
- e. It is not impossible to suggest that all Local Government headquarters in the Country be linked through digital telephone. This will go a long way to ease some of the problems of linkage Nationwide.

CONCLUSION

Ndiulor (1996) has observed that events have proved that most achievers are good dreamers. But that dreams not backed with articulated programmes of actions end up as mere hallucinations. Nigeria has a record of good visionary leaders but bad achievers. An example of the correlation between dream and achievement could be seen in President George Washington of the United States of America who saw the present greatness of America about 220 years ago.

What Nigeria needs is the political will to achieve the dreams that our great leaders in the past have always had. The vision 2010 is another of such great dreams. We need achievers to actualize these dreams along the suggestions we have made regarding communication and rural development.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Adnan, Mohd. Hamdan bin (1991). The Nature of Development, In, Module on Development Communication 1, Kenya: ACCE, pp 5-6.
2. Ahmed, M. and Combs (1971) Attacking Rural Poverty: How Non-Formal Education can help. Washington, D.C. World Bank Group.
3. Bergin, Francis J. (1982). Practical Communication, 2nd ed. London: Pitman Books. pp 4-5.
4. Bofo, S.T. Kwame (1991). Module on Development Communication 1, Kenya : ACCE.
5. Chambers, Robert (1988). Rural Development: Putting the last first. New York; Longman. pp 4-5.
6. Dakur, M.B. and Gupiyem, G.G. (1997). Nigerian Librarians in the 21st Century; A Focus; being a paper presented at the Conference of Librarians in Nassarawa and Plateau State Organized by Nigeria Library Association on 8th August 1997 at the National Library Auditorium, Plateau State Branch, Jos, pp. 18-19.
7. Daniel, Bassey B. (1997). Mass Communication : Concepts and Essays. Calabar, Wusen Press Ltd.
8. Eboh, Camillus (1996): Abacha Issues "Vision 2010" Economic Package. In the Guardian, Thursday September 19th. Vol 13, No 6523. pp 1-2.
9. Ehiemetalor, E.T. (1988). Education and National Development Benin City: Nigerian Educational Research Association pp 1-4.
10. Emovon, A. C. (1987). National Development and the Problem of Ethnicity in Nigeria. In Development Studies Review, Vol. 2, No. 1. October, p. 106.
11. Evans, Desmond W. (1979). People and Communication. London: Pitman Publishing Ltd, p.8.
12. Harrison, Paul (1982). Inside the third world, 2nd ed. England: Penguin Books.
13. Hedebro, Goran (1982). Communication and Social Change in Development Nations : A Critical View. Ames Iowa: Iowa State University Press, pp. 115-117.
14. Izeze, E.M. (1996). Vision 2010 is a lofty dream, say Corporate Managers in "The Guardian" Wednesday. October 9th, Vol. 13, No. 6543.
15. James, Sybil et al (1990). Introduction to Communication for Business and Organizations. Ibadan: Spectrum. Books Ltd. pp. 2-7.
16. Nwankpa, Emeka (1996). Shonekan may head 'Vision 2010' panel, in (The Guardian) Monday, September 23, Vol. 13, No. 6,527, pp. 1-2.
17. Njoku, Jude (1997). Economists advise vision 2010. In, (Saturday Champion) Saturday, July 19th, Vol. 3, No. 29, p.4.
18. Nwosu, Ikechukwu, E. (1990). Mass Communication and National Development. Aben-Frontier Publishers. p. 75.

19. Royers, Everett M. (1982). Communication and Development: Critical Perspectives. Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, pp 130-135.
20. Rostow, W.W. (1960). The stages of Economic growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
21. Thirlwall, A.P. (1983). Growth and Development with Special Reference to Developing Economies 3rd ed. London: Macmillan, pp 47-58.
22. Title, Peter (1997) Vision 2010 needs selfless leader to success. In (The Nigeria Standard) Wednesday, August 20th, No 6, 764.
23. Websters Dictionary of English Language. Deluxe edition (1992). Chicago: Ferguson Publishing Company, p.268.