

Chapter Ten

THE MASS MEDIA AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN INDUSTRIAL TRAINING FUND (ITF)

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INTRODUCTION

The expected role of the mass media in the developing countries of the world in relation to their 'watchdog' role has been and would remain a subject of debate for some time to come. While some schools of thought feel that, the role of the mass media should be dictated by the peculiarities of the environment in which they operate, there are those who argue that the traditional roles of the mass media to promote democracy, good governance, respect for human rights and so on, should not be compromised.

In the course of the debate, terms like 'Development Communication', 'Development Journalism' and 'Development News Reporting' have come up. The question is, can the mass media serve as an effective 'watchdog' which is their traditional role in society and also serve as development partners as canvassed by certain schools of thought?

This paper advances the debate on what should be the role of the mass media in a developing country and supports the standpoint that concerns for development, should temper the "right to tell" of the mass media in the developing world in line with their peculiar needs. It zeroes the argument on the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) and how the media can partner her to achieve her goal as an organization saddled with manpower development for the country.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper draws from the concept of "Development Journalism" which is hinged largely on the proposition of the Development Media Theory propounded by Mcquail (1987). According to Folarin (1998:40), the concept of Development Journalism "emanated from efforts by scholars from developing countries to "cut the umbilical cord" that has tied them to western communication scholarship since it has been discovered that western models

of journalism and of journalism-related scholarship were not in fact transferable to developing countries." They wanted a journalism which demands that news reporting should not just be constructive but also geared towards development ends.

Folarin went ahead to identify two types of Development Journalism: Investigative Development Journalism and Benevolent Authoritarian Development Journalism. Investigative development journalism advocates critical questioning and evaluation of the usefulness of development projects and the efficiency of control by the authorities concerned, focuses on complaints of "misgovernment" and probes allegations of corruption both of which may undermine development. Benevolent Authoritarian Development Journalism advocates selective handling of information in developing countries which are crises-prone. The advocates, Folarin(1998:41) added, hold that the important thing "is to ensure that public welfare is kept in mind at all times." This substantially agrees with the assumptions of the Development Media Theory which according to McQuail cited in Anaeto, et al. (2010:63), argues, thus:

- ❖ The media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with national established policy.
- ❖ Freedom of the media should be open to economic priorities and development needs of the society.
- ❖ The media should give priority in their content to national culture and languages.
- ❖ The media should give priority to news and information that link with other developing countries, which are close geographically, culturally or politically.
- ❖ Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedom in their information gathering and dissemination tasks.
- ❖ In the interest of development ends, the state has a right to intervene in, or restrict media operation, and devices and direct control can be justified.
- ❖ Although scholars have argued that the last assumption tended to negate the principle of press freedom there is no doubt that the proponents of Development Journalism and Development Media Theory have valid arguments that cannot be wished away. It is the valid aspects of their propositions that this paper propagates.

THE ROLE OF THE MASS MEDIA

The role of the mass media as far as Nigeria is concerned is clearly spelt out in Section 22 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,

1999. According to the section:

The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people.

This paper is interested in the aspect which mandates the mass media to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in Sections 13 to 21 of the constitution and beyond which encompass what can be described as the 'dreams' of Nigeria as a nation state. The mass media are by interpretation, expected to support anything that would assist in making Nigeria what it ought to be. The mass media are to be part of the 'development train' to transport Nigeria to the social, political, economic and technological port to earn the tag of a developed nation.

This agrees with the position of the 'Development Journalism' theorists who postulate that the mass media in developing countries should take up the challenge of promoting development. As earlier stated, the concept of development journalism or communication actually evolved out of the need to correct perceived imbalance in world information order which had seen the Western mass media focusing more on negative issues in developing countries. It is well established that most reports on developing countries like Nigeria concentrate on crime, conflicts and disasters which frighten prospective investors or financiers of projects from these countries (Jimada: 2006).

Development is viewed in some quarters as a product of modernization with traditional ways of doing things giving way to more refined ways (Huntington 1971:286). Jimada (2006:22) buttresses this:

In concrete terms, modernization entails systemic structural differentiation, producing an industrial or post industrial economic order that guarantees steady increasing levels of material prosperity...

The Human Development Index (HDI) used to measure the progress of a people/nation in terms of longevity i.e. life expectancy; knowledge i.e. literacy level and standard of living as measured by purchasing power parity (PPP) has clearly established the link between economic prosperity and human development. The ITF which is the focus of this study has training and manpower development as her primary responsibility. Her role as an agent of development in the country is thus obvious.

THE FUNCTIONS OF ITF

To situate how the mass media can partner an organization like the ITF in furthering her objective, an understanding of her purpose is helpful. Section Four of Decree 47 of 1971 which established the ITF lists her responsibilities to include:

- ❖ identifying manpower trends in the economy which are influenced by training;
- ❖ stimulating the adoption, by client organizations, of such training practices and standards as are identified by the ITF to be appropriate to their needs;
- ❖ informing public and private client organizations of the ITF of changing social, political, economic and other external factors affecting training and requirements, and to advise on these as appropriate.

The above are in tandem with the general philosophy of the organization which emphasizes, among others;

- ❖ provision of high quality services in the area of Human Resource Development (HRD),
- ❖ empowerment of organizations to provide corresponding high quality products and services,
- ❖ the maintenance of very strong interface with changes and developments in the national and global economy through proper relationships with employers' organizations
- ❖ the maintenance of such relationships with government to ensure that government's best intentions for HRD are achieved for propelling the country into an industrial era of sustainable development, and
- ❖ the adoption of systematic approach for training and human performance improvement as a corporate strategy for sustainable growth and development.

THE MEDIA AS STRATEGIC PARTNERS

What is the role of the mass media in actualizing the philosophy of the ITF? How can the mass media partner the fund to publicize and project its activities? The Director General/Chief Executive of the ITF Associate Professor Longmas Sambo Wapmuk at the 2007 Annual Performance Review Meeting of the fund acknowledged how the implementation of certain Public Relations instruments have assisted in boosting awareness for ITF and its activities. This is no doubt an admission that partnership the media has been beneficial.

The role of the mass media in projecting any organization and ultimately, development in a country, has been well established. According to

Jimada: since the mass media serve as an important function of agenda-setting in mass communication, the news media by covering development news regularly and frequently can help raise development issues to a critical point of national policy decision-making and public discourse ... (Jimada 2006:13)

He submitted that the mass media can raise public awareness, create consciousness about development, inform people and help them to make the right choices and can influence policy makers to pay attention and follow the news media closely because the news both reflects and shapes popular opinion. This is true in many respects and we can now look at how the mass media can bring this to bear on the ITF.

If for instance, the issue of additional funding for the ITF which the management of the fund has been advocating for some time is well projected by the mass media, it could get the policy makers to pay attention to the outcry. They can through constant publications in the mass media come to appreciate the need to heed the call and take necessary action in this regard.

Discussing the role of the mass media in national development, David Koroma (1999) noted that the mass media are at a vantage position to motivate and promote immediate and long term aims and aspirations of the people of developing nations by raising the level of people's consciousness in matters relating to national development. Thus the mass media in projecting the activities of the ITF could foster understanding of her aims and objectives, clarifying unclear issues related to the fund's mandate to stakeholders and through this, engender better cooperation.

For example, employers' organizations like MAN, NECA and NACCIMA which members constitute the bulk of contributors to the ITF could be made to better appreciate the efforts of the fund through informed reports and analyses in the mass media. Similarly, the difficulties encountered by the fund in effectively carrying out some of its mandate, such as the underfunding of the Students Industrial Work Experience (SIWES) which often result in some unpleasant reactions from certain quarters could be avoided or be better appreciated if well reported or discussed in the media.

However, there are those who have argued that the mass media could also be a hindrance to development if they choose to exercise their enormous power in a negative manner. Former President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia raised this argument as far back as 1964 when he said;

The press is capable of making government; given the appropriate condition, it can cause war or create conditions for peace; it can promote development or create difficulties in the way of development... (Kaunda 1964)

From the above, it is obvious that the power of the mass media can be employed to achieve negative ends where practitioners decide to so use it. The 'watchdog' role of the mass media entails exposing the ills in society towards effecting positive change. But arguments on the limited 'effect' of some of the various exposés in the mass media have been advanced by some scholars with some suggesting a change of approach in the reportage of issues considered negative.

For instance, advocates of development communication would rather that journalists confront the management of an organization with the facts of a negative issue concerning the organization and then report on the efforts being made to address it than play up the issue in a manner that would inflict sometimes irreparable damage on the image of the establishment. To them this is how the mass media can be true partners and not be 'fair weather friends'.

Since every organization desires positive publicity, it is imperative that their public relations departments/ units be strengthened to get the mass media on board as partners in progress. This will enhance access to information concerning such organizations as well as make for easy clarifications of issues that could generate negative publicity. One of the findings of this study was complaints by journalists of lack of access to information from organizations which make them rely on secondary sources. They also complained about the lack of or ineffectiveness Public Relations Departments/Units with which they could relate to be in position to project their activities. Such a situation does not augur well for the expected partnership and the expected dividends.

CONCLUSION

We have looked at the concept of Development Journalism or Development Communication vis-à-vis the watchdog role of the mass media in society. The paper argued in favour of advocates of a shift in 'the more negative, the bigger the story' news style of the developed nations to viewing issues from our peculiarities as a developing country. There is the need to temper the enormous powers of the mass media with concerns for growth and taking more responsibility in ensuring that we experience development in real terms. The paper also examined how the mass media can from this standpoint partner the ITF in achieving her mandate for the overall benefit of the country. As Enahoro (1990) argues,

...if we are to survive as a nation, the Nigerian journalist must have courage, hindsight, foresight, fairness and a sense of duty to the community. He must be sensitive to his environment. He must ensure the confidence of the people by having respect for

the truth and the people...

In this light, the paper makes a clarion call to mass media practitioners to be strategic partners in publicizing and projecting the activities of organizations saddled with specific responsibilities towards achieving the development goals of the country. They should, however, do this without compromising their watchdog role in society.

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