

Full Length Research Paper

Challenges of Communication Strategies for Sustainable National Development in Nigeria

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This paper identifies some of the challenges facing communication strategies in sustaining national development. It reviews issues surrounding communication strategies and supported the findings empirically with a view to understanding possible barriers to development using communication strategies. Using convenient sampling technique, 50 respondents from Nigerian Ministry of information and National planning were sampled. Data for the study were collected with the aid of structured questionnaire and focus group discussion. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics and Kendall rank test, with the aid of statistical packages for social sciences (SPSS). Basic challenges identified include ownership of communication outfit to technical, cultural, and ethno religious issues in Nigeria. We suggest that the implementing agency of National development should adjust the strategy on the basis of the evolution of the stakeholder groups' levels of knowledge and awareness. Development projects must also be firmly rooted in people's local reality, their organisations, their customs and their culture.

Key words: Sustainable development, challenges, communication strategies.

INTRODUCTION

The need for sustainable development most especially in developing countries has necessitated a refocused attention on effective communication strategies. Sustainable development provides real improvements and changes in the quality of human life and conserves the vitality and diversity of the people. The basic role of communication in a sustainable national development is to guide people towards a full awareness of the needs, situation and the available options for change (Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada, 1998). Communication further helps individual in a nation to acquire relevant skills that are essential to improving individual and societal condition

leading to a sustainable national development. The vital role communication plays in development pave way for a need to comprehend the basics of communication strategy.

In Nigeria, ineffective communication strategies has been the cause of ethnic and religious differences among the citizens, thereby making development agenda a difficult task to implement. Thus, effort aimed at understanding barriers to effective communication strategies will refocus the nation toward achieving her developmental goal. Hence, this study.

Communication strategy is conceptualised as a func-

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tional strategy, providing focus and direction to the communication function. It is facilitated by a practitioner performing the role of the communication manager at the functional organisational level. It is the outcome of a strategic thinking process by senior communication practitioners and top managers, taking strategic decisions on the management of, and the communication with, strategic stakeholders. Developing Communication strategy makes the Communication function relevant in the strategic management process and national development by providing the link between the national goals and its communication plans (Cornish et al., 2011).

The basic concept of communication strategy as a tool for national development could be based on the assumption that a developing nation is governed as a strategic management function. Thus, communication strategy assists the nation to adapt to ever changing peoples behaviour by achieving a balance between economic imperatives and socially acceptable behaviour. Further, it identifies and manages issues to ensure that national goals are aligned to societal values and norms; and that it builds and strengthens relationships through communication with those on whom the nation depends to achieve its economic and socio-political goals.

Hence, communication strategy that will ensure sustainable national development can be summarised as including both the formulation of communication goals in the communication function's 'deliberate' strategy development (typically as part of the budgeting cycle, for example once a year), as well as the ongoing formulation of communication goals as part of 'emergent' strategy development (the latter resulting from environmental scanning and issues management).

A well employed communication strategies may be a powerful force for change in both developed and developing countries. In developing countries, it can have a vital role in advancing a sustainable pro-poor development agenda, as well as supporting economic growth by stimulating consumer markets. In circumstance where communication is able to efficiently fulfil the roles of agenda-setter, it can improve governance by raising citizen awareness of social issues, enabling citizens to hold their governments to account, curbing corruption, and creating a civic forum for debate (Norris and Odugbemi, 2010). It can also amplify the voice of marginalised and excluded groups (BBC, 2006). Communication strategies for development has thus come to be seen as a way to amplify voice, facilitate meaningful participation, and foster sustainable development. The 2006 World Congress on Communication for Development defined it as a social process premised on dialogue through a broad range of tools and techniques. It is also viewed as a means of seeking change at different levels including sharing knowledge and skills, building policies and trust, and learning for sustained national development (Inagaki, 2007).

A key aspect of governance is how citizens, leaders and public institutions relate to each other in order to make change happen. Without communication structures and processes which enable the two-way exchange of information between state and citizens, it is difficult to imagine how states can be responsive to public needs and expectations. Crucially, two-way communication allows citizens to monitor the states' activities, to enter into dialogue with the state on issues that matter to them, and to influence political outcomes. Many political scientists believe this encourages the development of trust between state and society, and is a foundation of state legitimacy over the long-term.

Communication strategies and development objectives

Cornish et al. (2011) examine the link between communication strategy and National strategy. Their findings indicate that communication plays a significant role in supporting democratic development and stimulating economic growth. In spite of its relative under-prioritisation in development assistance, few dispute the power of communication, and in particular the catalytic role of the media, in influencing governance relationships and processes: communication is widely seen as vital for connecting states with society, facilitating inclusive political systems, giving 'voice' to poor and marginalised groups, and enabling citizen participation and social accountability. Communication advocates also argue that the strategic use of political communication tools and methodologies can influence the attitudes, opinions and behaviour of key stakeholders and secure the political will necessary for reforms to be successful on the ground. With the recent rise of the fragile states agenda, there has been increased academic and donor interest in how communication can contribute to state-building by improving state citizen relationships and helping to (re)build social contracts in conflict-affected states.

Nevertheless, legitimate questions remain regarding the role of donors in supporting communication in pursuit of good governance, not least what type of support is likely to be effective, what choices have to be made between supporting different types of media, and how to ensure interventions in this area are demand-led, sustainable and ultimately in the public interest; particularly the interests of the poor and marginalised. Overall, many studies conclude there is a need for better understanding of the circumstances under which communication, and in particular the media, can be a powerful force for positive, developmental change, and why in other cases it can be a more malign force capable of blocking pro-poor reform, engendering political violence, and sustaining undemocratic political systems (Wilson et al. 2007).

Evidence of effect of communication strategies

highlighted by Coffey (2007) show that a open communication environments – particularly free media and access to information – are correlated with improved government responsiveness and accountability, lower levels of corruption, and economic development. It is widely acknowledged, however, that correlation does not prove causation, and caution is needed in drawing direct causal links between good communication structures and good governance. At the process level, there is some empirical and anecdotal evidence, largely contained in the political communication literature, of how communication can impact on people's opinions and behaviour; for example increasing people's individual knowledge of or participation in political systems, or their support for good governance.

FUNCTIONS OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

A communication strategy includes several complementary communication functions which are essential for national development. These functions are practical building blocks in the design of a communication strategy and include policy communication, educational communication, social or facilitative function, time-sensitive communication. As highlighted by Röling (1994) policy communication expected to be initiated by government agency involve making policies, programmes, and the evolving procedures known. The basic attributes of educational communication which is expected to be initiated by service providers, include making technical know-how accessible to increase knowledge about the production, transformation, organisation and marketing dimensions of production activities of a nation. Also, price information should be made known. Attributes of social or facilitative communication, a platform for participation and debate function include providing platforms for stakeholders to exchange perspectives, explore new ideas and programmes, appreciate differences of opinions, negotiate common goals, develop partnerships, propose changes to programmes and become confident participants able to articulate needs and opinions (Ramirez and Quarry, 2004).

CHALLENGES OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

In an attempt to advance sustainable development agenda, media and communication development often faces challenges in the form of weak technical skills, poor professional journalistic standards and dearth of financial resources. Other challenges include fragmented legal frameworks, poor integration of both ICT and traditional platform and an undemocratic political system or lack of enabling political environment (Minnie, 2007). There is also a risk that in benefaction societies, the media may

not be able to break free from its political constraints and may operate according to clientelism or be captured by private interests ('media capture'). As noted by Mcbean (2005), other possible impediments to positive contribution of communication strategies to sustainable National development include power and control, ownership of the process, cultural and social norms and uptake by individuals and societies.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Federal capital territory (FCT) of Nigeria. The choice of location is based on the centralization of Nigeria administrative sections in the territory. The population of study is also located in FCT. In an attempt to obtain empirical information on the subject of study, we employed convenient samples of 50 staff of ministries of information and National planning, who were asked to highlight challenges facing communication strategies in building a sustainable National development. In addition, Focus group discussion was carried out to shed light on the identified challenges plaguing communication strategies. Focus group discussion is a means of collecting qualitative data to support the quantitative data. It involves direct interviews and interaction with the sample population. The primary data were used in this study with the aid of structured questionnaire. The respondents included senior officers of federal ministries of information and National planning in Nigeria. Data collected were organised, processed and analysed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS 20). Descriptive statistics and Kendall rank test were used to analyse the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The identified challenges facing communication strategies are presented in Table 1. These include ownership problem (22%), ethnic and cultural barrier (24%), religious differences (28%) and ignorance (20%). Ownership of communication outfit determines to a larger extent, the type of communication strategies to be put in place and the expected development. When private ownership of a nation's communication outfit is in the hand of government, the government is bound to see itself as the sole dissemination of communication strategies. The consequence of this is political brainwashing. Because one the essence of communication strategies is to check the excesses of the government policies, truth about developmental agenda becomes hidden (Mgbejume, 1991). As a result, communication and media outfit becomes mere political tools used only to advance the wishes of the government. However, if ownership of communication and media outfit lies in the hand of private, cost constraints, doctored opinion, individual bias, and non constructive bias are the likely consequence.

The challenge of technical is related to the country's technical dependence on foreign equipment and assistance. Built-in economic and ideological biases almost

Table 1. Challenges facing communication strategies in Nigeria

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage
Ownership of communication outfit	11	22
Technical	3	6
Ethnic and cultural barrier	12	24
Religious differences	14	28
Illiteracy, ignorance and poverty	10	20

Source: Field survey, 2013

Table 2. Communication strategy formulation process in Nigeria

Strategy	Ranking Test Diagnostics	
	Friedman and Kendal's mean rank	Chi-Square statistics
Development of deliberate communication goals	3.63	
Setting efficiency targets.	3.64	
Setting evaluation methodology	3.27	28.124*
Generating communication plans	3.52	
Develop a communication framework	3.33	

*significant at 5 per cent

inevitably infect even the most well-intentioned forms of bilateral aid (Head, 1974). Also most of the technical aid could be tied thereby influencing the positive way to which communication strategies could be put for transformational and developmental agenda. Subconscious absorption and dissemination of foreign culture are bound. This makes unveiling a true developmental agenda through communication strategies peculiar to a nation more difficult.

Another challenge identified as limiting the role of communication strategies is ethnocentrism. Nigeria as a country is currently bedevilled by sharp ethnic division such that any communication strategy for sustainable national development has to pass through baptism of ethnicity. This challenge makes developmental objectives very difficult to achieve.

Challenges of posed by illiteracy among a people with various cultural and ethnic backgrounds poses the problem of understanding one another in developmental objectives designed by communication strategies. Misunderstanding and suspicion of each other's intention is more likely among people of different educational and literacy background.

The communication strategies in Nigeria were evaluated using both Friedman and Kendal's raking order test. The ranking diagnostics test as measured by chi-square statistics was significant at 5 per cent level. The ranking test value for both Friedman and Kendal were the same. This is consistent with a priori if the specification is significant. The result indicates that communication strategy process usually formulated in Nigeria is setting

efficiency targets (Table 2). Usually, in communication theories, efficiency targets are set in order to enhance communication objectives. This will be expected to increase the efficiency of the communication function. Next, is development of deliberate communication goals. The concept of deliberate communication goals involves the review of strategic priorities, resulting in a series of communication goals and themes. Further, generating communication plans is next in strategy formulation process of Nigeria communication development agenda. In this set up, properties defined in the communication strategy for each of the intended communication plans is expected to feed automatically through to the new Communication plans.

Evidence from focus group discussion (FGD) shows that communication strategies employ by stakeholders in Nigerian communication is very limited. Policy communication strategy with focus on unidirectional transmission of government policy to the people, without feedback from the people back to the government highlights communication agenda in Nigeria. This might have led to several challenges facing communication strategies in Nigeria.

Conclusions

Sustainable development leads to realization of societal ideals relevant to the requirements and aspirations of any nation. In this study, we identified the challenges hindering communication strategies in the quest for sustainable

development. Basic challenges identified ranges from ownership of communication outfit to technical, cultural, and ethno religious issues in Nigeria. While sustainable development is desired by all, resolving the challenges and harmonisation of views towards national development cannot be overemphasized in the quest for sustainable national development via communication strategies. Further evidence from FGD indicates that the implementing agency should adjust the strategy on the basis of the evolution of the stakeholder groups' levels of knowledge and awareness. The most important lesson we have learned is that development projects must be firmly rooted in people's local reality, their organisations, their customs and their culture.

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