

## Challenges of Development Communication in a Multi-Cultural Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The challenges of development communication in Nigeria where over 250 ethnic groups and more than 400 languages coexist alongside diverse religious and cultural practices. Rooted in McQuail's Development Media Theory, it explores how cultural, linguistic, and value-based diversities influence the effectiveness of communication strategies deployed by development institutions. Using a library research method, it reveals that communication for development in Nigeria is often hindered by language barriers, conflicting cultural worldviews, power dynamics, divergent social values, and limited access to credible information channels. These challenges frequently constrain participatory communication and weaken the capacity of institutions to achieve developmental goals. In conclusion effective development communication must be context-sensitive, participatory, and rooted in people's cultural realities. It recommends the localization of communication strategies, intercultural competence, and the integration of communication at the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of development programmes. By fostering trust, inclusivity, and dialogue, communication can serve as a vital tool for promoting sustainable development and national cohesion in Nigeria's multicultural society.*

**Keywords:** Development communication, Challenges, strategies, culture and Diversity.

## **Introduction**

African traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam are the main religion practiced in Nigeria; with Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as main Ethnic nationality each blending with these religions in major large cities and towns with diverse populations, international schools and workplaces with employees from diverse cultural backgrounds and various countries, this situation is typical of a Multi-Cultural society like Nigeria. Notable, there are over 250 ethnic groups and over 400 languages spoken, Each of the component groups has its own language and custom and accepts one or more of the main religions. Nserake (2019).

The idea of Development communication is on track with advocacy, social mobilization and behaviour change communication. Communication is recognized as a key element and an instrument of development processes. It is core to development programmes, facilitating development to empowering individuals, communities, and societies to overcome inequalities, barriers and exploitations to achieve their potential, and improve their lives. Effective communication is the thread that weaves together the complex fabric of development, facilitating dialogue, encourages active participation and sharing of knowledge or exchange of ideas and values among people and institutions that brings social, economic, and political progress. Sinha (1976).

Development is the process of growth, progress and improvement in aspects of personal, social, economic, political, cultural as well as environmental (United Nation, 2015). Communication is frequently used to mean spreading of information or generating media material. But these approaches often lead to disappointing result. Empirical evidence shows that simply raising awareness can fail to make impact on what people think and do (FHI, 1999

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Seidel, 1992 Jackson, 1997). According to UNDP (2011) cited in Ibrahim & Gambo (2019), communication processes are central to broader empowerment practices through which people can arrive at their own understanding of issues, to consider and discuss ideas, to practice and to engage in public debates at community and national levels.

Development institutions are often established with a view to determine, pursue and achieve some development goals. Such tasks require the deployment of strategies and tools to facilitate the attainment of the goals, which are sometimes designed internationally or locally. The institutions usually design implementation strategies and document the procedure for the utilisation of the available resources to attain the goals. For example the National Orientated Agency (NOA). According to Anaeto and Solo-Anaeto (2010), communication is a significant tool used by development institutions to facilitate the pursuit of their mandate. They argued that communication is being deployed subsequent to goal-setting using baseline data. At the starting point, development institutions conduct needs assessment, problem definition, identification of target audience, identification of communication networks and resource inventory. Anaeto and Solo-Anaeto (2010) further argued that communication is an integral part of activities of development institutions that deal directly with the public. Despite the deployment of various approaches, strategies and problem solving methods, development institution often faces some challenges as a result. The study looks at the challenges of communicating developmental issues in multi-cultural Nigeria.

## **Communication for Development.**

The Effectiveness of communication is necessary to inform people taking actions, decisions and the relevant skills to improving living conditions. In development communication, the development

initiative is centered on the ruralites as such communication should be geared to people's community mobilization towards participation, decision taking/making and action, Creating awareness, exchanging knowledge, attitudes, behaviour as well as informed lifestyles (FAO 2006). Development communication is seen as the systematic planning communication through mass media and others like Information Communication Technologies, inter-personal channels, social networking sites. Information is collected and exchanged through out parties involved in the planning of the initiative for development aimed at getting a solution for the issues identified as hindrance to development strides.

Communication strategies are purposeful, structured, repeatable, and adaptable strategy to inform and influence community decisions to personal and public health participation, disease prevention and promotion, policy making, service improvement, education, and research (Oyo-Ita, Nwachukwu, Oringanje, & Meremikwu, 2011; Lewin, Sophie, Leyla, Sara, Xavier, & Claire, 2011). Communication interventions are believed to have contributed to the successes recorded in many campaigns in Nigeria such as the polio eradication initiative, HIV/AIDS eradication campaign, exclusive breastfeeding, COVID-19 pandemic, Fight against terrorism, drive to patronise home made products etc. It is on such basis that development institutions responsible attract change and bring development deploy communication in their strategic plan to achieve their mandates of Affordable education for all, compulsory enrolment of pupils into basic education as well as environmental Protection through waste management, flood mitigation, Enhancing community watch for a more robust security, battle against corruption to bring unity and development in Nigeria.

### **Multi-Cultural society**

A setting where people coexist in diverse cultural groups within a geographical location, central idea or internet mediated space, where cultural differences are recognized, respected, and celebrated (Vertovec, 2020) cited in Emenike (2025). It is central to the study of communication, development and development communication in any multicultural society, as it emphasizes the need for understanding and managing cultural differences to foster harmonious interactions among people from various backgrounds. In Nigeria, where there are over 250 ethnic groups, the ability to navigate multiculturalism effectively is crucial for promoting social cohesion, unity, and mutual respect. Effective communication is the key to ensuring that multicultural societies can function cohesively, and it allows individuals from different cultural backgrounds to collaborate, learn, and thrive together (Emenike 2025).

A multicultural society should address the skills and knowledge required to bridge cultural divides and enhance mutual understanding. In Nigeria's multicultural society, where linguistic and cultural diversity are prevalent, intercultural communication competence enables individuals to navigate differences in communication styles, values, and social norms. Enhancing this competence is essential for fostering inclusive communication that contributes to social harmony, reduces prejudice, and promotes effective collaboration across diverse cultural groups (Adediran & Ogunlade, 2022). Though where these intellectual communication is limited or missing then there bound to be challenges for communication development.

### **Impact of Communication for Development**

Developmentally, communication is designed to socially foster every segment of the community in sender/receiver information establishing a new

Knowledge with focus on these: Dissemination of messages and motivation of participants (field workers and village or community people). The optimality of development can only be realized if knowledge and technologies are shared effectively and ruralite participants are encouraged and acknowledged to attain great success.

Community development is focused on bringing on board a group of people to plan and act accordingly within the community in order to spring up the satisfaction of their needs with a view to bringing about desirable change in the lives of the people through their cooperative efforts and by actively taking part in measures designed to improve their conditions of living (Adedokun 2008). The coming together of these people in a co-operative way presupposes that there must be effective communication between and among the people. Without effective communication, there would be misgiving and misunderstanding and this would always result in conflict, lack of co-operation and subsequently lead to underdevelopment.

Reeves (2012) tried to x-ray the 2010 fight against Terrorism campaign “if you see something, say something” of US department of Homeland security (DHS), avers that Programs such as policing the community. Neighborhood watch, and other campaigns like if you “See Something, Say Something” were groomed by some shaky conditions of domestic sovereignty or ownership, that is, the government’s delegating authorities or functions to citizens through expression of these in contrast the normal institutions charged with such duties or responsibilities.. Reeves went further to suggest that: (i) rhetorically responsibilities these thrives on more coercive nature than just a mere individual will by rallying on culture of social suspicion. (ii) state apparatus or agencies streamline by those who aid in identification

through subjectivities (iii) it is generally achieved through manipulation under the guise of loyalty to the state and subsumes all social responsibilities in terms of community excellence thriving in peace or homeland security. Largely, because currently surveillance based policing like neighbourhood watch has just become norm than bizarre.

In order to address and improve lives of poorest people and most marginalized sectors of the society for sustainable development through the instrumentalities of communication, the following three key areas as identified at the Earth summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 should be tackled; the environment and rural development, and the social dimension Mefalopoulos (2005). Summarizing the core issues facing the field of communication for a sustainable development: the customary ideology of communication rooted in information dissemination is not enough to addressing the new issues of development framework, based audience centered lenses. Secondly, communication is not blended in project planning, objectives and planned activities. communication for sustainable development is brought on board afterwards implying that communication made up a single or only element advocating the aims and activities stated. Thirdly, examining of the effect of communication and SDG, quantitatively as well as qualitatively the impact should be looked at. Participatory model evaluation Should be hinged on new conception of development.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is hinged on the propositions of Development Media Theory by Denis McQuail 1987. According to Baran and Davis (2010), the theory advocates media support for an existing social system and its efforts to bring about national development. This theory sees media as an agent of development that should be used to facilitate development. The theory is media-

centric because it advocates the instrumentalization of the media of communication to serve as development tool. It also has focus on the operation of the media because, it suggests that all media operations should be titled facilitating the development of the society within which it operates. To this end, the theory explains the deployment of communication channels such as radio, television, newspapers, outdoor media like billboards, posters, pamphlets and other traditional media used by development institutions in achieving their developmental mandates.

### **Some of the Challenges of communicating Developmental issues in multi-cultural society**

Nigeria a multi-cultural society present some caliber of challenges when Communicating developmental issues, this is due to intersecting, cultural, linguistic and value-based differences key includes.

1. Language and semantic barriers: it refers to technical terms e.g. sustainability empowerments, lacks direct translation or carry unintended connotations and nuance in local dialects may distort messages such as gender equality might misinterpreted as disrupting social hierarchies.
2. Cultural world view conflict: this has to do with the time orientation linear progress cyclical traditional view of changes. Spiritual, material. Development goal may clash with spiritual, religious priorities such as land is sacred, economic resources.
3. Power dynamics and trust deficit: entails local power structures e.g. traditional rulers, elders may resist messages challenging their authorities.
4. Divergent values and proprieties: concepts like human right, gender equality may conflict with the local norms on the other hand economic

development and environmental preservation trade off viewed differently across cultures.

5. Media and information ecosystems: limited literacy or digital access restricts channels. Thus, the issue of credibility, misinformation dissimulation through trusted local networks, countering developmental narratives.

While reviewing literatures, it was observed that the development institutions have communication issues/concerns that require attention. They all have specific attentions to the use of communication to address concerns that, may hinder the attainment of their mandates. Institutions recognise the fragmentation of the public, and thus, indicate target audience. Similarly, deploying peculiar strategic implementation and activities that would be conducted to address the communication concerns, recognising research, monitoring and evaluation to give room to evaluate the impact of the strategic blueprint.

Ojenike, B, Adedokun, S. O, Odunsi AO. &Ojenike J. O (2014). That challenges of Communication for development in Nigeria 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. Importantly, development projects must be firmly rooted in people's local reality, their organisations, their customs and their culture.

Silvio (2015), outlined some challenges for Communication and global social change as: issues of fragmentation, secondly is the problem of participation and aid effectiveness, thirdly challenge of policy advocacy, he observed that communication scholars and institutions needs to

address these three intellectual challenges in other to engage with reflexivity of development.

### **Methodology**

The paper adopted Library Research Method to gather relevant literature that comprised online and offline documented research papers and published journals. This study consulted relevant books and journals which documented issues related to in accordance with existing literature in order to interrogate challenges of communicating developmental issues in multi-cultural society, as well as the descriptive research method. Most of the materials in the study were drawn from qualitative data collected from secondary sources such as pertinent texts, journals, official publications, historical records, and websites, which served as tangible sources of insight into the research process. The materials obtained from academic publications, books, the internet, and libraries.

### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that the institutions recognise the significant role of communication in delivering their mandates. This informs their decision to deploy communication tools and strategies to enhance their public engagement and delivery of their primary and secondary responsibilities. In this regard, communication is reflected by these gestures as lubricating substance in development institutions. Thus, development communication becomes indispensable tool in the institutional model of developing societies and vital tool for the creation and maintenance of a cordial social and working interaction. That query for dominant change of thoughts and relationships among individuals for the resolving of the issues and these are viewed as effective communication and important condition for every aspect of community existence.

### **Recommendation**

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The following are panaceas recommended to minimizing issues or challenges of implementing developmental communication in various institutions and Agencies of government in Nigeria:

- 1- Nigerian policy planners and decision makers must understand that communication is far from just sending messages, informing or convincing audience to change their Character; it is a requisite for Communication Specialists to enlighten the need for a paradigm shift in communication functions through facilitating mutual understanding, building trust among stakeholders when planning and making decision, thus, communication metamorphosis as central factor in fostering participation and strengthening sustainability in such a state or community.
- 2- Communication is transversal to any discipline, when strategically used in investigating core problems, not limiting to programmes, information circulation, projects' objectives, the knowledge and practices should be in a way that can Lubricate the identification and designing of thought provoking programmes, considering the dichotomy in perceptions, needs and knowledge of the target audience or participants.
- 3- People's participation should be central to a Development Communication professional, for instance, the level of positive gains should be measured based on the participants grade level; the benefactors For example, when weighing the effect of a programme aimed at reducing deforestation, the evaluation cannot focus only on progress made in reducing the rate of deforestation, but has the people within the area also affected by the programme.

- 4- Localisation of developmental communication strategies and techniques, that is the community's obtainable reality, ideologies, their hierarchies, their beliefs and their norms as well as the community's women and youth camps should be Engineered into the strategy especially at the planning, execution and assessment level.

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