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The Mediation of Dependence: Development Communication Planning for Agricultural Development in Northern Nigeria

by Jubril Bala Mohammed*

Abstract

This paper examines the place and role of development communication planning in the context of Nigeria's effort to develop its agricultural sector with particular reference to Northern Nigeria. Three cases were identified to show that rather than develop the agricultural sector, the government policies tend to accentuate dependence in this sector.

The author argues that development communication planning for agricultural development in Northern Nigeria would not lead to the desired goals of developing the sector. It is therefore argued that the agricultural policy framework needs radical revision.

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La Médiation de la Dépendance: Planification du Développement de la Communication pour le Développement Agricole dans le Nigéria Septentrional

par Jubril Bala Mohammed

Résumé

Cette communication examine la place et le rôle de la planification du développement de la communication dans le secteur agricole au Nigéria septentrional. Trois cas étaient identifiés pour soutenir notre soumission, celle qui est convaincue que, plutôt que de développer le secteur agricole, ces politiques (agricoles) accentuent, en réalité, la dépendance du secteur agricole.

La communication dénote que la planification du développement de la communication pour le développement agricole au Nigéria septentrional, non obstant ses bonnes intentions, ne pourrait pas mener aux accomplissements désirés pour développer ce secteur, donc le cadre politique agricole doit être radicalement révisé.

Introduction

Communication plays an important, though supportive role, in various national development projects (Bordanave, 1977; Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971; Opubor, 1986). It is in this context that the crucial role of development communication planning in agricultural development in Northern Nigeria is depicted for closer examination.

A conference of development communication scholars held in 1981 at the East-West Communication Institute in Hawaii, U.S.A., defined development communication planning as a "deliberate, systematic and continuous effort to organise human activity for the efficient use of communication resources and for the realisation of communication policies in the context of a particular society's development goals, means and priorities and subject to the prevailing forms of economic, social and political organization" (East-West Communication Institute, 1981). Three aspects of this definition are noteworthy.

First, development communication planning is a deliberate, systematic and continuous effort. This means that it is purposefully built on a careful examination of the concrete situation and is successive. Development communication planning does not stop with one plan, but is continuous until the goal is attained.

Secondly, the essence of development communication planning is to organize human activity to attain an efficient use of communication resources for development purposes and to attain the goals of communication policies designed for the particular society in question.

Third, development communication planning is subject to the prevailing forms of economic, social and political organization of the society under consideration. Communication exists as a dependent variable in the development process.

Taken from a functionalist point of view, human endeavours directed at overcoming development problems may generate functional and/or dysfunctional consequences. These consequences may be functional if the action attains the goal(s) for which it is intended, and dysfunctional if it attains unintended goals.

Development communication planning may also result in functional and/or dysfunctional ends. In order to ensure that development communication planning attains the desired goal, it is therefore fundamental that the entire process be predicated on a clear and careful understanding of the total environment of the plan.

A brief review of the history of the mass media would reveal that

they are of colonial origin beginning with the *Iwe Irohin* established by the Presbyterian Missionaries in 1859 in Abeokuta, South Western Nigeria. The Nigerian Press was essentially a colonial tribune through which news gleaned from the metropolitan press was redistributed and economic information from the colonies disseminated both primarily, but not exclusively, for consumption by Europeans (Ibrahim, 1983). Similarly, the history of broadcasting in Nigeria began with the decision by the colonial administration to boost its propaganda capacities by the advent of World War II. In 1939, the British colonial administration had established a relay station for the BBC in the country.

The dawn of independence in the post-war years witnessed the "liberation" of the mass media as they became influential organs of the anti-colonial struggle. This patriotic inclination was maintained in post-independent Nigeria as they stood vehemently against secession during the country's civil war of 1967-1970.

During the Second Development Plan period (1974-1980), the accruing of oil revenues attracted widespread foreign business presence in the Nigerian economy. More business opportunities were opened up in the country and advertising became a source of revenue for the mass media. Several private newspapers and magazines were established and pressure was being mounted for the establishment of private broadcasting.

The period of economic structural adjustment in 1985 liberalised fiscal measures and several economic restrictions were lifted. Broadcasting also became commercialised in 1987. Half a decade later, the President, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, informed the nation of his plan to grant licenses to interested parties to establish private broadcasting stations in the country (NTA Network News, January 7, 1992).

If the origin of the mass media is foreign, so also is their staff development pattern. In his seminal contribution on media professionalism in the Third World, Golding (1974) stated that the metropolitan powers imposed the respective models of their media system on those subservient powers. Here in Nigeria, pioneer media staff obtained their professional training via attachments to the BBC; in some cases experts were seconded from London for on-the-job training in media establishments in Nigeria.

Formal training facilities, especially for very senior personnel, commenced with the establishment of the Jackson School of

Journalism, under American auspices and attached to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1960. Programming exhibited a number of western products while technological acquisition remained heavily foreign.

Consequently, Golding (1974) has submitted that "professionalization" in the Third World, especially Nigeria, which was his case study, "has been, in effect, integration into a dominant global culture of media practices and objectives as developed in the media of the advanced industrial societies. This integration has been achieved through three mechanisms: institutional transfer, training and education, and the diffusion of occupational ideologies."

With this background, the dependency theory will be examined in the context of Nigeria's effort at agricultural development with special reference to Northern Nigeria.

Dependency Theory and Agricultural Development in Northern Nigeria

The dependency theory, in its origin and usage, has a deep Latin American background. The theory emerged after the failure of the modernization theories and models of development, characterised by import substitution which were in vogue in the immediate post-World War II years, to explain and overcome the problems of underdevelopment in Latin America.

The central hypothesis of the dependency school is that development and underdevelopment are both products of intertwined structures within the same global capitalist system. As Dos Santos (1973) puts it:

Dependence is a conditioning situation in which the economies of one group of countries are conditioned by the development and expansion of others. A relationship of inter-dependence between such economies and the world trading system becomes a dependent relationship when some countries can expand through self-impulsion while others, being in a dependent position, can only expand as a reflection of the expansion of the dominant countries, which may have positive or negative effects on their immediate development.

Similarly, Sunkel and Paz (1982) have also stated that development is a universal structural process of change and underdeveloped countries are those which lack an autonomous capacity for change and growth and are thus dependent for these on the centre. Furtado

(1982) also stresses the importance of situating underdevelopment within a global context where the underdeveloped countries are but sub-systems.

Although it is not exclusive to dependency theorists to situate underdevelopment within a global capitalist context, what is unique to their approach, however, is "the attempt to start from the world economic structure to then develop the laws of motion of the dependent economies" (O'Brien, 1982). Rather than being an external phenomenon, dependency is a "conditioning process" with the structures of development of one set of countries or regions within countries (rather than its own) inducing the dependence of the former on the latter.

Relying on this theoretical point of departure, leading scholars have studied various aspects of Latin American, and indeed Third World, underdevelopment. These studies have lent historical evidence to support their thesis that the colonial relationship between the metropolitan countries of Western Europe and North America, on the one hand, and the various countries and regions of Latin America, on the other, was responsible for the present state of dependence and underdevelopment of Latin America. Frank (1972) has shown that the economic, political, social and cultural institutions and (class) relations that characterise the contemporary underdeveloped societies are products of the historical expansion of the capitalist system to incorporate these societies. He showed further that by taking advantage of these relations, programmes and policies such as the colonial class structures, Latifundim agriculture, independence struggles, free trade policies and various liberal political reforms, the imperialist bourgeoisie successfully promoted the development of capitalist relations of production in Latin American countries and regions within countries and their eventual incorporation into the international capitalist economy with an inferior status in the international division of labour.

Similarly, Amin (1981) has traced the origin and contemporary forms of underdevelopment and dependence in black Africa to its incorporation into the international capitalist economy. He identified three phases in this process. Phase one, the mercantilist period from the 17th century (1800), was characterised by the slave trade and the resultant decline of the productive forces throughout the continent. By the end of this period, black Africa's economy had become attuned to serve the requirements of American plantations through the supply of cheap labour, and thus, black Africa lost its autonomy.

Phase two occurred from 1800 to 1880/1890. This period was characterised by the establishment of "legitimate trade" in export crops to meet the need for raw materials by the capitalist industries in the West as well as the monetisation of the economies of the continent.

Phase three involved the period of formal colonial domination when Africa became fully integrated into the global capitalist economy. In this period, the structures of Africa's dependence and subsequent underdevelopment were deeply entrenched and vehemently safeguarded.

But dependence and underdevelopment are not only manifest in international contexts but also intranationally. Thus, certain regions within countries appear victims of a dependency syndrome. In his analysis of the process of dependence and underdevelopment in black Africa, Amin (1981) stated that the coastal areas of West Africa, owing to their early contacts with the capitalist West, became centres of intense economic activities ranging from mining to commerce while the hinterland was reduced mainly to suppliers of labour to meet the requirements of the economies of the coastal areas.

Legitimate Trade Policy and Agricultural Development

As a manifestation of dependent development, the agricultural sectors of the underdeveloped part of the world became sensitized to the demand for certain crops as raw materials for Western capitalist industrial operations. For instance, the abolition of the slave trade and its substitution by legitimate trade witnessed the increased attention paid to certain cash crops such as palm oil, rubber, cotton and groundnuts, which were dependent on foreign markets. This process of incorporating the agricultural sector into the global capitalist economy by emphasizing export-oriented farm products was greatly maintained in the period of colonial rule (Hogendorn, Nkem, 1985).

Nigeria, a country of vast size and enormous natural and human resources, was, until the advent of the 1970's, heavily dependent on agricultural products for its foreign exchange earning. Nigeria was an exporter of such agricultural products as palm oil, groundnut, cocoa, timber and rubber, among others, all of which featured prominently in the list of commodities emphasised during the period of legitimate trade. Thus from the early 1960's, the focus of government agricultural policy favoured cultivation of those cash crops and relatively little attention was given to the cultivation of food crops. In 1962, for

instance, Nigeria spent ₦46.98m on food imports. This figure was to leap to ₦51.5m in 1966 and ₦57.9m in 1970 (Awoyemi, quoted by Titiola, 1987).

The Origin of the Food Crisis

Contrary to the claim that the origin of the food crisis in Nigeria dates back to the 1970's when oil exports became the country's main foreign exchange earner to the detriment of agricultural production, in reality, the genesis of this problem lies in the policy of legitimate trade when emphasis was placed on the cultivation of cash, rather than food crops. The period of the 1970s nevertheless showed that with oil exports on the increase and more foreign exchange accruing for the country to cater for her growing imports, a negative development in relation to agricultural commodities, hitherto the main source of foreign exchange, was simultaneously occurring, i.e. a downward slide in prices on the world market.

The need for self-sufficiency in food production in Nigeria from the late 1970's through to the 1980's has led to massive investments in the agricultural sector. These justifiable investments are based on three tenets: First, the need to adjust the disproportion in the rate of growth between the nation's population and food output. In 1963, Nigeria's population was 55 million and the country was almost self-sufficient in food production. Two and a half decades later, the country's population has almost doubled while net input of the agricultural sector has become more negligible. There is, therefore, a compelling need to increase farm output in order to lessen the misery, threat of hunger and malnutrition that may befall the population if this dangerous trend were to continue.

Second, there is need to conserve foreign exchange by controlling food importation. To conserve money which could have been utilised for other development purposes, the government felt an urgent need to invest in the agricultural sector to attain self-sufficiency in food production.

Third, and by no means least, the need to develop agri-based industries also encouraged government to pay more attention to revamping the dwindling agricultural sector. Additional encouragement has also come through the Export Promotion Campaign of the present administration which is aimed at boosting non-oil exports to diversify

the sources of the nation's foreign exchange earnings.

National Agricultural Development Policies – A Review

Accompanying these resource commitments, governments have, over the years, also formulated and executed a series of policies and programmes to stimulate agricultural growth in the country. Some of these programmes, launched between 1970 and 1985, include:

- (a) National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), launched in 1972 and aimed at increasing farmers' income and accelerating the rate of diffusion of new agricultural technology;
- (b) Agricultural Development Projects (ADP's), launched in 1975 and partly financed by the World Bank, was meant to promote integrated rural development through the provision of modern facilities, extension services and feeder roads;
- (c) Livestock Development Projects (LDP), begun in 1976 with the objective of boosting beef production nationwide;
- (d) Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) was started in 1976 to encourage backyard farming among the urban populace as well as distribute fertiliser and improved seeds to farmers;
- (e) Agricultural Credit Guarantee System (ACGS) and Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB) both aimed at making funds available to farmers on a loan basis;
- (f) Land Use Decree was promulgated in early 1978 to ease the process of land acquisition for large-scale agricultural operations; and
- (g) Green Revolution Programme was launched in 1980 and was essentially designed to meet the needs of small farmers and further spread the benefits of rural development to the grassroots.

In addition, governments have resorted to encouraging biochemical means to invigorate the agricultural sector. These include the use of genetically developed high-yielding seeds, pesticides, and herbicides, most often obtained through foreign sources. These facilities were initially imported but later, in conjunction with foreign transnational agri-business concerns and other western-based international agencies, the government established centres and industries for their local production.

For instance, the multi-million naira Federal Super-phosphate

Company (FSC) located in Kaduna, Northern Nigeria was established by the federal government in conjunction with Kellog, an agri-business transnational corporation. Ferdinand (1984) has pointed out that the economic motivation of these agri-business transnational firms in the ambitious agricultural programme of the developing countries, including Nigeria, stem from the desires of such firms for increased markets and profits for their products.

Similarly, in the sphere of financing, governments have encouraged the participation of finance capital. The World Bank is clearly involved in the operations of the ADPs and RBRDAs nationwide. Other sources of foreign capital input in the Nigerian agricultural sector include the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the International Finance Corporation (IFC), among others. These financial investments were rationalized in the context of the fledgling economic situation of the country and the pressing demand to meet import requirements.

Yet as Titiola (1987) summarized it, inspite of all these programmes, the Nigerian agricultural sector is far from satisfactory for the following reasons:

- (a) the share of agriculture in the GDP declined from 61% in 1964 to 18% in 1980;
- (b) the share of export earnings attributed to agriculture also declined from 71% in 1964 to less than 5% in 1979;
- (c) the share of food and animals in the total import bills rose from 8% in 1964 to 11.3% in 1980 and
- (d) there was an increase in the rate of domestic food prices.

However, since the military takeover in 1984 government policy towards the agricultural sector has relied on three pillars: The River Basin and Rural Development Authorities (RBRDAs); the partly World Bank financed Agricultural Development Programme (ADP); and the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI).

Three observations can be made about this policy. First, it emphasizes large-scale rather than subsistence farming. Large-scale farming involves the acquisition, clearing and tilling of large portions of arable land, particularly in the vicinity of large rivers and lakes in various parts of the country. Consequently, governments, both federal and state, have established Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs) and River Basin and Rural Development Authorities (RBRDAs)

during the Third National Development Plan period 1975-1980. Two reasons underlie the existence of these programmes:

- (a) to serve as resource centres for the dissemination of modern agricultural technologies to the country's predominantly rural based farmers and
- (b) to stem the tide of rural-urban migration by extending modern amenities to improve living conditions in the rural areas.

Central to the operation of these large-scale government farms in relation to farmers is a unique strategy for the utilization of communication resources often manifest through extension services.

Another observation is that the policy is capital based. A lot of resources have been committed by these ADPs and RBRDAs in the purchase of farm equipment such as tractors, trucks, earth movers, water tankers, pipe lines and pump heads. This equipment is, to a large extent, assembled in the country by foreign transnational corporations, but in some cases, the equipment is imported directly from abroad. Additional resources are used on spare parts and the training of maintenance staff. In some complex cases, maintenance technicians are flown in directly from abroad.

What is conspicuous, however, is that owing to the nature of their operations, the ADPs and RBRDAs have become heavily dependent on modern equipment which rolls off the assembly line of foreign firms. Thus, as these large-scale farms come to possess high import content, the fear is that the nation may be gravitating from food dependency to technological dependency.

The third observation on government agricultural policy is the emphasis placed on specific grains, notably rice, barley and wheat, all hitherto imported. The importation of rice, which in 1981 stood at nearly one billion naira, was stopped in 1984 while wheat and barley, equally in high demand, were still being imported three years later. Justifying the ban on importation of these grains, the then Chief of General Staff and Member of the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC), the country's highest decision-making body, pointed out that the action "is in line with the country's Structural Adjustment Programme" which "is part of the whole process of Nigerians looking inwards for most of their needs" (*African Concord*, Nov. 26, 1988.).

However, observers contend that the ban on rice importation seemed to have paid well as locally produced rice now inundates the market. The same may not yet be said about the other two grains, particularly

wheat, which appears to enjoy greater impetus as several states in the northern part of the country have mapped out ambitious programmes for the exercise. Several of these states have already established special task forces on wheat and barley cultivation in addition to the operation of the ADPs, RBRDAs, and DFRRI. Optimists project that of the states in the Northern part of Nigeria, Borno/Yobe, Kano/Jigawa and Sokoto/Kebbi states stand out as most promising for wheat and barley production on a massive scale. These states, which have an ADP, RBRDA and DFRRI each, are located in the northern most fringes of the country. They all exist in the Guinea savannah vegetational belt, a region allegedly climatically suited for such projects.

However, experts at the Institute of Agricultural Research (IAR) of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, have pointed out that though government has good intentions, the grains may only thrive well in areas under high temperature. They contend that cultivation would thus be restricted to areas within northern Nigeria which would also be the dry season during Harmattan, hence the necessity for irrigation (*African Concord*, 26/12/88, p. 11).

In a study of the possibility of wheat and barley production in the Northern part of Nigeria, Andrae and Beckman (1985) have taken a gloomier position. They identified the obvious constraints associated with introducing a temperate crop into a tropical environment such as Northern Nigeria, as well as the refusal of the peasantry to be subordinated and controlled by the requirements of large-scale farming involving massive capital and advanced technology (Andrae and Beckman, 1985).

Regardless of the differences of opinion on the viability of wheat and barley cultivation in Northern Nigeria, the federal government has already taken the decision to go ahead with the project relying on the active involvement of the ADPs, RBRDAs and DFRRI as well as the Special Task Forces on wheat and barley production established by various state governments.

The Dilemma of Development Communication Planning

Earlier we noted that development communication planning is a variable dependent on "... society's development goals, means and priorities and subject to the prevailing forms of economic, social and political organizations" (East-West Communication Institute, 1981).

Consequently, given the dependent pattern in the country's

agricultural development policy over the years, this pattern is bound to influence the character of development communication planning in the agricultural development policies examined above.

For instance, in a recent tour of agrarian communities in Biu local government area of Borno State in Northeastern Nigeria, both farmers and extension agents have come to expect solace from above.

For example, in the first case, a farmer complained of lack of fertiliser as a result of which, he said, crops may suffer. Without obtaining more evidence on the farmer's complaint, the extension agent replied that government, through the state ADP, has placed several tonnes of fertilizer on order for subsequent distribution to farmers through their cooperatives.

In the second case, on radio programmes aired throughout the Northern states, an expert is normally brought from a relevant agricultural agency to speak on some aspect of agricultural activity with the expectation that the farming audience may listen and utilise the information to promote agricultural development.

In the third case, farmers in the Biu area informed the local authorities of an invasion of army worms. "The only solution is to purchase chemicals and spray the area probably by hiring a helicopter", replied the officer in charge of agriculture. Both are costly for the Local Authorities. The ADP extension personnel and the local government official present were not forthcoming with alternatives as the farmers watched their crops being ravaged.

In these three cases, the development communication agents (i.e. extension officer, radio programme producer and the local government official) have, consciously or otherwise, become agents of dependence. Exposure to such material might enhance individual apathy which, for Lerner (1958), was a major condition for acceptance. In each of these three cases, the farmer is presumed inferior in the communication process, and then conditioned to look up to the authorities for a solution to his problem. It is rare for farmers to communicate among themselves to confront a common problem and thus enrich the process of development communication.

Consequently, development communication planning in this total context, no matter how well-intentioned, well-polished and well-conceived, may come to nought since the dominant policy of agricultural development in Northern Nigeria, indeed, the nation, is dependent. Given the dependent nature of underlying agricultural development policies over the years, it would be inconceivable to chart a meaningful,

and purposeful development communication planning programme.

Conclusion

There is definitely a dependency syndrome in Nigeria's effort to develop its agricultural sector, and this has occasioned dysfunctional consequences in the content of development communication planning.

Earlier I argued that development, however defined, basically consisted of a liberation from a less desirable to a more desirable form (Mohammed, 1990). Therefore, to liberate development communication planning from its dependency quagmire, a closer yet critical examination of the nation's agricultural policies over the years is imperative. It must drastically address the place and role of the farmer in the communication process in order to harness his potential in developing the agricultural sector.

Any meaningful development communication programme must be primarily aimed at reassuring the farmers that they have a major role to play in resolving their own difficulties through sharing experiences with one another. The extension agent should be seen as student and teacher.

Thus, with a liberatory rather than a dependent agricultural development policy, this radical reorientation of development communication planning will mature in the course of time to benefit the country, especially Northern Nigeria.

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