

The Mass Media and ICT: Predictable Strategies for Sustainable Extension Services in Nigeria

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Abstract: Extension service in Nigeria is not yet sustained for rural farmers' competitive advantages. Local farmers have agitated for inclusion and fair play in agric development projects in their abode; but have never gained substantial level of attention from 'government'. Nigeria can meet up the development indicators entrenched in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by rigorously investing in mass media and ICT for rural development through high level information delivery. Sustainable extension service is a strategic dimension to human development. It saves the natural environment from total degradation by utilizing modern communication technology for gathering, packaging and disseminating agric information to rural farmers. Nigerian government has faltered in the deployment of modern infrastructures to rural areas through inconsistent legislations, neglect and misappropriation of funds. Mobilization of the rural people for agriculture development is quick and cheap through well mounted media campaigns and appropriately installed ICT infrastructures. It is cost effective when deployed en-mass with responsive wider coverage if appropriate channels are exploited. This paper examines the availability and strength of the media and ICT infrastructures in Nigeria and establishes that the maximum utilization of the media and ICT for sustainable extension services in Nigeria is desirable.

Keywords: agriculture, degradation, development, extension, ICT, rural, sustainable.

I. Introduction

Extension service in Nigeria has come a long way. Meanwhile, the impact on the development of the agric sector remains unconvincing despite the deployment of human and financial resources to extension service by successive governments at the federal, state and local levels. Hitherto, despite the impressive array of mass communication paraphernalia in the country, there is still no acceptable pavilion to argue that there is really 'mass' communication in the country; rather what actually obtains is 'massive 'incommunication' (a process where available communication system including the mass media are only used for and by the elites and urban people or where inappropriate information are disseminated). This view is further put in another form by Adesonaye (2009) when he argued that there could not be any legitimate claim of 'mass communication in Nigeria because the media of mass communication is used to talk (to) rather than talk (with) the masses. This has affected the type of information, quantity and time received by the rural people who are majorly farmers. Consequently, the local people usually do not take the extension agents serious. They do not believe in the information or innovation they pass across having understood that the information and dissemination strategies are packaged without farmers input or contribution. Moreover, Mac Donald (1984) posited that farmers mistrust outsiders and so will resent agents who take ready-made plans for them to follow without prior consultation because they felt they were being directed or told what to do rather than being helped to make their own decisions. Therefore, development programmes initiated by governments in parts of Africa (Nigeria) aimed at improving the living standard of the people, have either achieved minimal success or failed because of the negative attitude of the people (Akpomuvie, 2010).

Recent decades have witnessed policy development and balancing between real need and growth in Nigeria. Beyond these policies and frameworks, some of the concepts of various programmes and development

projects under different policy require serious explanations and enlightenments to help (farmers) explore innovations and technologies effectively. In 2011, the National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services (NAERLS) reported that there was a general shortage of extension staff as reflected by high level of extension agent/framer ratio of 1:2000 and 1:12000 against the FAO recommendation of 1:1000 (NAERLS, 2011). Some of the reasons given for this dismal picture are inadequate and untimely released of fund to Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) in many of the states of the federation; poor remuneration and incentive packages for extension workers; poor roads and transportation system and lack of access to tangible information through modern communication facilities.

The high cost of air-time has affected the frequency and scope of the transmission of much agricultural information to the rural and urban people (NAERLS 2010, 2011). As the only agricultural extension research institute in Nigeria, NAERLS has consistently called on the Federal Government to help it prevail on the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) for reduction on air time charges. This call is an indication that the institution recognises the importance and effectiveness of the mass media and ICT to the discharge of its extension mandate advisory services.

In a study carried out by Emma Ogueri and Vincent Nnadi on sustainable rural development in Nigeria, it was discovered that the selected respondents from the Southern and the Northern parts of the country indicated that one of the reasons why government development programmes failed was lack of awareness and sensitization among the rural folk (Ogueri and Nnadi, 2010). Furthermore, limited access to information as a result of inadequate power supply, inadequate knowledge and skill about information technology was also cited by these researchers as major impediments to the advancement of farmers in rural communities. This, obviously, has affected the productivity level of the farmers even as they are valuable contributors to chain of production in the rural setting. Most times, media reports are slanted in a manner that runs contrary to established professional codes and acceptable international best practices in Nigeria which one of the reasons certain information concerning agriculture may not be reliable and dependable. Lack of adequate capacity in media output monitoring and quality control has ensured that the sector is not always at the cutting edge (DGDP, 2011).

As part of its strategy to control agricultural practices in Nigeria especially in the rural communities, NAERLS has always engaged the electronic media (both private and public) houses and many national newspapers for the dissemination of agricultural innovations to all the local government areas in Nigeria. Apart from the publication and distribution of reports on national survey on agricultural performance and forecasts for every year farming activities (which include input supply and market price information), 20 million farmers have been reached through farm visitation and National Agricultural Questions and Answers (NAQAS) system. These feats have definitely been achieved at extreme cost of air time and ICT facilities deployed by the institute. Even as agriculture is the largest contributor (47.5% in 2011) to the GDP of the country, the lack of, or access to information by local farmers has been recorded as the major factor not been effectively addressed by any development programme. Where this factor has been observed especially to carry along farmers and sustain extension message for a long term benefit and development of the sector, (Fairouz and Rifat, 2009) agreed that farmers enjoy straight competitive advantage. The authors, while citing FuHo (1996), recognised three major roles for ICT in development as administrative, operational and competitive.

The competitive one, they said is becoming most important for sustainable development in advanced economies. For instance, Britain and United States have been able to effectively project and market their nation's development through British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C.) and Cable Network News (C.N.N.) (which are functional and accessible to local farmers), (Ohimai, 2008). Why can this be done in Nigeria? There seems to be an inverse relationship between development and ICT for the execution of agricultural programmes and adoption of technologies by farmers at the rural settings in Nigeria at the expiration of many development projects. The question therefore is what has gone wrong? Can agric development in Nigeria be sustained and become competitive through the existing extension service system without the utilization of the mass media and ICT potentials? Below are the objectives that guided this exploratory research work.

1.2. Objectives

- I. To establish the relevance and potentials of the mass media and ICT for extension service delivery in rural Nigeria.
- II. To advocate for the acceleration of the deployment of ICT facilities and media reform to enhance sustainable competitive extension service system in Nigeria.

2.3. Methodology

The method employed in this study is the review of existing and relevant documents such as books, journals, periodicals, case records and documents reports by government, individuals and organizations (especially on NAERLS Adopted Village activities) in Nigeria.

II. Mass Media and ICT in Nigeria

Developing countries are facing a lot of development problems of which how to use new media effectively to promote rural development is one. The desire to overcome this problem led to the conceptualization of many approaches to communication, information and ICT facilities development in developing countries. In Nigeria, the government has deployed approaches like Economic Modernization Approach, the Political Economy Approach, the Entertainment Education Strategy (EES) and recently the Inclusive Communication Approach which tends to empower local audiences to social action. Albeit, we may argue that the utilization of inclusive communication approach by the Federal government of Nigeria is to allow all stakeholders have a say in the development of agriculture through ICT potentials, the role of communication technologies and the media in rural development initiatives in Nigeria; there appears to be little attention on their impacts on people while participating in rural development projects. Agboola (1981) stated that the rural people usually accuse communication experts of only implementing the theoretical aspect of information dissemination for local integration by not carrying them along.

In his findings, (Akpomuvie, 2010) revealed that the majority of the people in Africa (including Nigeria) lived in the rural areas and were not abreast with information about government programmes aimed at improving them. No doubt, Nigeria has enough media houses both electronic and print to carry out mass enlightenment and inform the populace but local people usually do not get informed (accurately and timely) about real government development initiatives. The recent claim and counter claim by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Minister over the real amount or figure involved in the proposed mobile telephone for rural farmers project is good an example of the above submission. While the secretary told the press that the project would gulp sixty billion naira, the minister refuted the figure but said the project will only procure 20 million mobile phones for distribution to farmers across the country. While analysts have faulted the minister's reaction, they submitted that the secretary was probably correct going by the fact that an average market price for a moderate mobile phone is between five and six thousand naira, thus if the ministry should procure 20 million of the handsets at five thousand naira, it will spend not less than sixty billion naira to do so!

While Ohimai (2008) listed that the basic function of information is to inform, educate and entertain, the rights and obligation of the media are stated in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Chapter 11, Section 22). The section explains that the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall be free to uphold the fundamentals objectives of the chapter as well as uphold the responsibilities and accountability of government of the people. These objectives are expected to promote and protect national interest, culture and resources among others. The right to know and know the truth is a fundamental human right. However, in many African countries, most often than not, majority of the mass media (apart from government-owned media) distant themselves from national interests (Ohimai, 2010). This because the media is built, funded and regulated by government. Unfortunately, the privately owned media houses comment more on political matters than informing the public on issues that will improve their lives especially in the rural areas. Sometimes, their reports or information confuse the public more than the government owned media outlets especially if their sources of information are from government agents and or the opposition camps.

Article (19) (2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 (which Nigeria is a signatory to) states that "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds (not restricted), regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media (internet, mobile phone, bill board, handbills, posters, books jingles etc) of his choice". In Nigeria, like other African countries, the condition of underdevelopment has been manifested in the increasing inability (of government) to provide the basic essentials of life to their citizens (Mazuri, 1980). One of which, no doubt is a responsive and accurate information dissemination system. The problems of hunger, unemployment, diseases, illiteracy have been compounded by lack of information, which up till now has implanted frustration into the socio-political system of the people especially at the local settings. With the advent of digital models of information and computer technology, business and government activities are witnessing a radical transformation in the management of information in the world. Therefore, Nigeria should effectively use its information resources and capacity to encourage the urgent task of economic development via sustainable agricultural activities as envisaged in the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA).

After all, the National Mass Communication Policy listed popular participation, equity and access to information and communication, freedom of expression and reception, communication rights and coherence with other sectoral policies as the guiding principles. It is gratifying that Nigeria's telecommunication (which is now private sector driven) is now the fastest growing telephone subscription based in the world (Ohimai, 2010). But it is sad that there is no single representation of the agricultural sector on the management board of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) despite the huge contribution of agriculture to national development and security food security.

3.1. Sustainability, Information and Agricultural Extension

Sustainable development as defined by the Brundtland Commission is the ability to make development sustainable – to ensure that development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The use of this definition has led to the designing of development programmes by governments with major focus on intergenerational equity. The commission also agreed that the concept implies (not absolute) limitations imposed by the present state of technology (communication/ICT) and other environmental resources (including agriculture). The IFAD Strategic Framework 2007-2010 (IFAD, 2007j) gave the following as definition of sustainability: “Ensuring that the institutions supported through projects and benefits realized are maintained and continued after the end of the project...” It is logical to conclude that one of the ‘institutions’ implied in this definition is agriculture since it is one of the environmental resources that must be developed for total human survival. To sum it up, (Robert et. al., 2005) concluded that much of what is described as sustainable development are negotiations in which workable compromises are found to address competing interests in such a way that the concrete challenges of sustainable development are at least as heterogeneous and complex as the diversity of human society. All these must be recognised in the communication policy that will develop Nigerian agricultural sector competitively.

From the foregoing, it is important that communication at all levels include all the indices of sustainable development in the above diagram. Thus, agricultural extension/information delivery – a process of communication of improved skills, practices, innovations, technologies and knowledge must engage all components of ICT in order to reach out to the rural farmers (Ani and Baba, 2009). However, Ogueri and Nnadi (2010) submitted that most rural communities in Nigeria have not provided safe environment for development while conflicts in the communities occasioned by clash for autonomy and personal interests had affected rural development initiatives. Public enlightenments and community-oriented development information can be used to calm many of these agitations and get the people attention integration into government development plans.

Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 2001) reported that wide adoption of research results by majority of farmers in developing countries remained quite limited. This notwithstanding, Nigerian farmers must have access to these technologies to fast track agriculture in Nigeria. Therefore, agricultural extension agencies have the central role in facilitating the flow of a variety of information to offer the needed exposure of farmers to innovation for overall development (Ani and Baba, 2009).

It is an abuse of the fundamental human rights of Nigerians if they still cannot get appropriate and viable information even as Nigeria was the second African country to have deposited National Action Plan on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights 2009-2013 with the U.N. Secretary General. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) played critical role in the development and publication of the NAP document which is also a commitment to concrete measures that can be adopted to entrench a culture of human rights in the country and all Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of government were sensitized on the need to mainstream the document into their developmental plans towards the end of 2009 (FGN, 2011).

To achieve and sustain development (sustainable development), revolutionary efficient, reliable and potential tools must be employed. These tools are the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as the Internet, mobile phones, e-mail, microcomputers among others (Festus, 2010). Having established that mass media and ICT are critical to responsive extension service for rural development in Nigeria; there is the need for extension agents to identify, prioritise and analyse focal problems of community entry for rural folks’ corporation and participation. Focal problems, also known as communication entry points, are the major causes of bad implementation of many development plans. Appropriate and objective communication can be used to eliminate or reduce these focal problems as a step towards solving the main problem of rural development programmes, thus assisting in the achievement of the communication and project objectives (Anyaeibunam, et al., 2004). The application of this model will ensure that information from media houses relevant to community needs and capabilities through the selection and prioritisation of the focal problems are done hand in hand with the people with clear alignment of relevant ICT facilities. This is important, since generally; neither the rural community nor the project team usually has sufficient financial and human resources to eliminate all the causes of the main problem (inaccurate or insufficient information about the benefits and the beneficiaries of development programmes) at the same time. There is the need for complementary of project objectives and community aspirations/ expectations.

III. Summary and Conclusion

The Nigerian media environment has not really favoured the farmers especially in terms of access to viable and responsive information on modern practices and innovations in agriculture. While observing that many state Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs) use few print and electronic mass media in their operation, it is well understood that financial and bureaucratic bottlenecks or lack of awareness of the electronic mass media might be responsible. Corruption and inconsistency of media reports as comprehensively reported by virtually all Nigerian media are other factors pulling down mass media efficiency in Nigeria even though the

country's media is fairly well-established. The situation remains so because the media usually expose corrupt acts after the demise of the administrations that perpetrated them (See African Guardian, 1 November 1993; The Guardian, 18 October 1993; Newswatch, 29 October 1993; The Guardian, 13 October 1993; 6 November 1993; and African Concord, 7 March 1994). Beyond the viability of this industry as engendered by Decree No. 38 of 1992 which has liberalized and allow for private license, there are other factors that have combined to whittle down the Nigerian media effects on national development.

4.1. Conclusion

The relationship between information technology and development (agriculture) has been established and it is very glaring from our discussions. It is obvious that ICT is increasingly becoming an important part of what we do on farms. Developing countries must adopt the ICT in order to become technologically relevant in the New World. Information is a critical factor in the development of any country. Though constraints like inadequate human capital, inadequate incentives to researchers/ media men and unreliable data abound in Nigeria; the country can still reap the benefits of ICT and the mass media as envisaged in the National Policy on Information Technology of 2001. The importance of information management based on the identification of the problems (including extension service) can only be anticipated, identified, if accurate, reliable and relevant information is obtained promptly from both internal and external sources.

The advent of new technologies, computers, microfilms, digital cameras, video recorders and the internet have made impressive mark on information gathering packaging and dissemination. In the view of this, agricultural information disseminators (extension agencies) must adjust and deploy this new system and equipment to effectively and efficiently get to rural farmers for total development of the sector. Consistency and accuracy are the operational rules of sustainable information broadcasting. However, government should speed up the development of infrastructures like roads, electricity and transportation system to help mass media and ICT utilization at the rural areas. To be succinct, the mass media and ICT are critical diplomacies for sustainable extension service delivery in Nigeria.

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WHAT IS TO BE SUSTAINED:	HOW LONG?	WHAT IS TO BE DEVELOPED:
	25 years, "Now and in the future", Forever.	
NATURE Earth Biodiversity Ecosystem		PEOPLE Child survival Life expectancy Education Equity Equal opportunity
LIFE SUPPORT Ecosystem services Resources Environment	LINKED BY Only Mostly But And Or	ECONOMY Wealth Production sectors Consumption
COMMUNITY Culture Groups Places		SOCIETY Institutions Social capital States Regions

Figure 1: Graphical Definition of Sustainable Development: Adapted from: U.S. National Research Council, Policy Division, Board on Sustainable Development, *Our Common Journey: A transition Towards Sustainability*, Washington, DC. National Press, 1999.

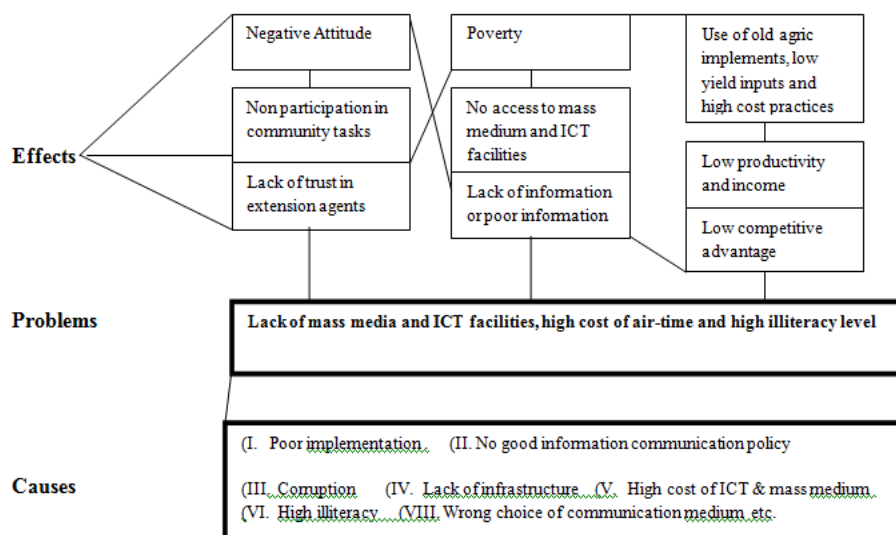


Figure 2: Situation Analysis Model for Participatory Rural Communication: **Source:** Adopted from (Problem Tree) Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal Handbook for FAO, 2004.