



Development Communication: A Social Project in Isuochi and the Role of the Media

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Abstract: *Development portends a gradual or immediate progression from a position of weakness to strength and fosters forms and patterns which lead to a realization of incremental human values. Development communication is concerned with disseminating the message of development which involves the application of communication techniques, principles, and technology in the development process. This paper explains in close detail, the role of the media in the realization of a social and communal project in the developing town of Isuochi in Umunneochi Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria.*

Keywords: *Development, Communication, Media, Message.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of the media in the society and in development communication cannot be overemphasized.

In development communication, the media as is expected of them contributes in the reportage of development news and in giving a voice to areas that ordinarily would not have a voice in clamouring for development.

Communication and development are so closely inter-connected that there can be no development without communication. According to Ekwelie (1999):

We have proof that development and communication can be complementary. We know that communication may fail to generate development. But after making all the allowances for accident in nature and society, we are still left with a paradigm that links communication with development.

Development communication is concerned with communicating the development message.

2. WHAT DEVELOPMENT IS

Development generally portends a movement or a change from a position of weakness to strength. It suggests a progression which could be gradual or immediate. In all, development engenders forms and patterns which lead to a better appreciation of social values and realization of human values.

Development can mean different things to different people but it has become generally agreed that there are definite features which should characterize any process of development. For example, development should bring change; the change should be for the better; the change should be for the benefit of the majority of the people; the process should be participatory that is to say, it should involve the people as closely as possible.

Development as defined by Linden (1989) is the process of change which aims at achieving self-reliance and improved living conditions for the underprivileged majority of the population.

Development is a positive change for the better from conditions such as social, economic, political, cultural and human which are no longer considered good enough for the goals and aspirations of a society to those that are most likely to meet those goals and aspirations (Moemeka, 1989).

Inayatullah (1975) defined development as –

Changes towards patterns of society that allows better realization of human values that allows a society greater control over its environments and over its own political destiny and that enables its individuals to gain increased control over themselves.

To Rogers (1976), development occurs on levels that are more than just on the economic level. He stated and differentiated clearly that development occurs on four levels which are –

a. *Personal development*

This is when an individual does something positive to change his/her existing situation to something better such as taking a job instead of loafing around in the street or even becoming self-reliant instead of depending on others or becoming honest and hardworking instead of spending time planning how to explain away lies and dishonesty.

b. *Societal development*

This is when there is a more equitable distribution of the wealth of the society or when identified social ills are tackled successfully.

c. *Human development*

This is when disputes that divides communities and groups are settled to the advantage of all or when nations pay adequate attention to human problems and provide opportunities for their citizens to exercise their rights and responsibilities with adequate recognition and reward.

d. *Physical (material) development*

This is when schools are built where there were none, roads are constructed to facilitate travels and transportation, industries are built to provide employment and higher incomes and higher standard of living, etc.

Rogers (1976) thus defined development as

A widely participatory process of social change in a society intended to bring about both social and material advancement including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities for the majority of the people through gaining greater control over their environment.”

3. WHAT DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION IS

Development communication is concerned with communicating the development message hence it could be defined as the use of all forms of communication in the reporting, publicizing and promotion of development at all levels of a society (Edeani, 1993).

Development communication according to Quebral (1985) is the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people.

Development communication is the use of communication techniques, technology, principles and practices in the development process.

Development communication is the application of the principles and practices of exchange of ideas towards the achievement of development objectives.

Since development communication is a communication process with a social conscience, development communication is oriented toward human beings, that is, toward the human aspect of development.

Development communication is viewed by some scholars as a course of study that gives an appropriate perspective to communication thereby helping the society to see its central place in human activities and showing members of society how to effectively utilize it.

Development communication regards the provision of facts and figures as an imperative in any development initiative as it places the highest emphasis on exchange of ideas and opinions on available facts and figures in order to create understanding.

Development communication is a pervasive discipline with varying definitions and approaches. But the differences seen in these definitions and approaches are only in degree rather than in substance. All the definitions and approaches emphasize to equal degree the concepts of participation, understanding and positive change. The ultimate aim of development communication is to create an environment in which people are willing to participate in the discussions on planning and execution of development projects which would lead to an environment which ensures understanding of issues related to development initiatives and ways of achieving expected outcomes.

Development communication is seen to play two broad roles. The first is Transformation. It seeks social change in the direction of higher quality of life and social justice and a redirection of the outcomes of modernization in order to eliminate any possible dysfunctions.

The second role is that of Socialization. Through the efficient and effective performance of this role, development communication strives to maintain some of the established values of society that are in consonance with development while discarding those that are detrimental. The socialization role aims at creating an environment in which citizens would see the benefits of changing unwholesome attitudes and behaviour in order to create a social system in which the benefits of social and material change can be maximized and utilized in the best interest of the citizens.

4. BRIEF HISTORY OF ISUOCHI

The people of Isuochi are the descendants of Ochi, a warrior and a wrestler who in search of healthy, stone-less and wind-swept area where he would have a suitable square for wrestling and other forms of sport, settled at Nkwoagu in the heart of the area called Isuochi. According to oral history, Ochi came from the East passing through Ishiagu in Afikpo and Umuchieze and finally settled at Isuochi.

Ochi had a son named Isu who later begot two sons, Ezi and Ihite. Ezi Isu had five sons – Abuga, Egbebi, Logu, Ekegbu and Digbo who later gave birth to the present villages of Umuelem, Achara, Amuda, Lomara and Umuaku respectively. Ihite Isu had four sons – Awa, Aguogba, Araka and Atuga who also gave birth to the present villages of Ndiawa, Mbala, Ngodo and Ihie.

Then, the people's occupation consisted of farming, animal husbandry, basket weaving, woodwork, trading, palm wine tapping, black-smithing and food processing.

Traditional methods of education formed the main factor which ensured the togetherness of the people of Isuochi from their humble beginnings even till present day.

In the old era, village mathematics which involved counting of numbers and adding them were taught to children. This enabled them to count their baskets, hoes, yams and other things. Young ones were also taught the art of communication and the use of signs and symbols during communication meant much. The use of proverbs in every day communication and as a situation requires indicated the level of a person's intelligence.

The town Isuochi has nine villages which are all thickly populated by a people who are mainly farmers, teachers, carpenters, traders, administrative officers, artisans and school age children.

The people are hard-working who by dint of industry and self reliance have contributed to the development of the area by making full use of her moderately fertile land, ideas, people and love for unity, peace and progress.

Isuochi is in present day Abia State and has been put under the administrative control of the Umu-neochi Local Government Area within the State. The community was formerly under the government of old Imo State until the creation of Abia State on 27 August 1991 in the present federal structure of the Nigerian federation.

The nine villages which constitute modern day Isuochi are all autonomous communities. This autonomy was granted them during the early 2000s by the government of Abia State.

With their autonomous status, all the nine villages that make up Isuochi are now self-governing and have their own Eze with other lower Ezes' who are heads of the hamlets under the domain of the Eze of the autonomous community. This situation was unlike what was obtained in the past where the Ochi 1 who is the paramount ruler reigned over the realm, Isuochi.

5. DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION: A SOCIAL PROJECT IN ISUOCHI & THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

Isuochi is a town that embodies the principle and practice of the term "self help." This is a trait that has been found in the Igbo of Nigeria but it seems that the people of Isuochi are fervent practitioners of that principle.

It is pertinent to note that the few development projects that exist in Isuochi viz – a health centre, a bank, schools, market areas and roads are as a result of communal efforts.

The recent project of which shall be discussed in this work are the installation and the maintenance thereof of **SOLAR POWERED STREET LIGHTING** in all nooks and crannies of Isuochi.

Perennial power issues have bedeviled the Isuochi community for so many years. Members of Isuochi community who reside in Isuochi and outside have contributed large sums of money in the procurement of electricity poles, its installation and the procurement of high tension electric wires. This ordinarily is the job description of the electricity company which the federal government owned as at that time.

Even when the electricity poles were all fixed and dotted the community and the wires put in place, there was no electricity.

The community had to contribute for the procurement and installation of electricity transformers. These were all fixed and yet there was no electricity to enhance the life of Isuochi citizens who were resident in the town.

Promises were made, assurances were given, yet there was no electricity for Ndi Isuochi. This scenario was what obtained in the Isuochi community from the era of the military to present day civil rule in a Nigeria of fourteen years of uninterrupted democratic rule.

Seeing that the community has suffered untold hardships in the hands of government and abject neglect in the hands of their elected leaders, the community and their local leaders resorted to what they know best which is self help.

Members of the community had to reach deep into their pockets and make contributions in order to make this project – the **SOLAR POWERED STREET LIGHTING**, a reality. This they have done. Isuochi is now lit up at night!

6. THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

Without the help of the media, this solar power project would at best not be a reality or it would still be stuck in the pipeline.

Isuochi is still a quietly growing town, and at present, there are no electronic or print media houses domiciled in the community. This implies that the traditional media of communication would have played a great role in the achievement of this task. And they did.

Traditional media of communication are home-grown arrangements or channels for the exchange and dissemination of cultural values and norms, symbols and meanings which are well acceptable and known by local community citizens. It entails the knowledge of such arrangements and its dutiful applications over time.

Ndolo (2005) defines traditional media as “indigenous, credible and acceptable channels of communication utilized by rural dwellers for various societal functions including dissemination of messages.”

According to Ukonu and Wogu (2008), traditional system of communication refers to “modes of meaning exchange that are rooted in a people’s culture, and which began from the era of preliterate and pre-modern man.”

Ugboajah (as cited in Nwosu, 1990) defined traditional media as the products of the interplay between a traditional community’s customs and conflicts, harmony and strife, cultural convergences and divergences, culture specific tangibles and intangibles interpersonal relations, symbols and codes and oral traditions which include mythology, oral literature (poetry, folk tales, proverbs), masquerades, witchcraft, rites, rituals, music, dance, drama, costumes and similar abstractions and artifacts which encompass a people’s factual, symbolic and cosmological existence from birth to death and even beyond death.

Traditional media channels are any form of endogenous communication system which by virtue of its origin, form and integration into specific culture, serves as a channel for messages in a way and manner that requires the utilization of values, symbolism, institution and ethos of the most culture through its unique qualities and attributes (Ansu-Kyeremah, 1998).

The instrumentality of the Town Crier was heavily relied upon in spreading the development need in Isuochi. This mode of communication was used to reach out to citizens of Isuochi who were resident

in Isuochi. The Town Crier made his rounds before the break of dawn and communicated the thoughts and ideas of the chosen representatives of the people who were charged with the responsibility of collating all ideas from citizens of Isuochi and appropriating all the financial proceeds realized from the contributions and donations of the people toward the realization of the solar power street lighting project.

It would have been an onerous task if the instrumentality of the Town Development Unions were not activated in the realization of this project. The township development unions serve as the umbrella body for marshalling the ideas, contributions, donations and suggestions of the citizens of Isuochi who are living outside Isuochi. The town development unions coordinate with the home branch in carrying out development programmes for the various communities that constitute Isuochi. In this occasion, it was no different.

The central market in Isuochi, the Eke Isuochi, served as a central ground for an interactive based communication system in the realization of the solar powered street lighting. At the market, traders as well as buyers who were all Isuochi citizens and residents had the opportunity to ask questions of their local leaders regarding the solar project.

The *Mbara* in different hamlets in Isuochi served as a meeting point for all citizens of Isuochi for the dissemination of information and thought sharing and providing a system of feedback regarding the solar powered street lighting project. Town Criers were used to summon the community to the various *Mbara* for deliberations and to provide feedback to the local leaders in charge of the community development project.

Also, in achieving this project for Isuochi, a modern system of communication was found to be potent. The global system for telecommunications was deployed. This was done through regularly sustained and massive sending out of Short Messaging Service, SMS, to all Isuochi citizens who were resident in the community and abroad. These messages were sent out to intimate them on the proposed plan of action and the need for them to make their own contributions to the achievement of the project and for the advancement and development of the Isuochi community.

Seeing that there was no other place like home, the citizens of Isuochi hearkened to the development call by their fellow compatriots and contributions and donations were made and sent down to the village for the execution of the project.

7. CONCLUSION / SUMMARY

The solar powered street lighting development project in Isuochi came to fruition as a result of development communication. Development communication is the dissemination of information to bring about the necessary change within a community such as Isuochi.

The traditional media of communication played a great role in bringing this project of lighting up the Isuochi community to reality. Some forms of the traditional mode of communication which were necessary and were used in realizing this project were shown in how they were deployed. Also, the use of the short messaging service, which is an arm of information and communication technology, was also used in the realization of the solar powered street lighting development project.

In the course of this essay, it has been shown what development and development communication is. An annotated history of Isuochi was rehashed; a development project was cited and the all powerful role of the media in the actualization of the project was depicted.

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