

Globalization and Development Communication in Africa



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Communication and Economic Development: An Assessment of the Impact of the Nigerian Press on NEEDS

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Introduction

Following the advent of democracy in Nigeria, former president, Olusegun Obasanjo, promised to rejuvenate the economic status of the nation through various reform programmes. In an attempt to stop the rot of the nation's economy, the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) was initiated. The belief of the Nigerian government was that, NEEDS represents a new beginning for Nigeria and that this reform programme offers us unique opportunities to become captains of numerous ships, barges, and canoes in the waters of our economy (Adamu 2006a: 12).

Over the last 30 years, efforts to effect a coordinated macro-economic blueprint have been fruitless. Like every other poverty reduction strategy—Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAP), NEEDS has also emerged. Economic plans adopted in the 1980s and 1990s such as the IMF-inspired Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), Millennium Development Goals (MDG), New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), Vision 2010 etc., all tended to be more forward looking, except that the SAP lacked "a human face" and leaders simply paid lip service to issues of the day without getting down to the root causes.

However, Nigerian's citizenry has not had the privilege of exploiting the promises of these programmes because they have thus far lacked a realistic and visionary economic agenda. According to the former Governor of Nasarawa State, Mr Adamu Abdullahi, in one of his papers; "The Challenges of Nigeria's Economic Development in the 21st Century: Baking the National Cake" (2006b), he described policy instability as the bane of Nigeria's economy, and said that various governments, in the past, have had laudable policy programmes that would have helped grow the economy and improve

the lives of Nigerians, but such programmes are often jettisoned by succeeding governments. The results have been, stunted growth and economic uncertainty. Ironically, the fault has not been in the programmes "but in policy instability that appears to have been accepted as a normal way of doing things in the country." He admitted that grievous mistakes have been made in the past which the country is still paying for.

Recent reports indicate that Nigeria is not sufficiently mobilizing or exploiting its local potentials. Take for instance eastern Nigeria, excerpts were from the BBC News online: local cottage industries are already fabricating basic machine tools, car parts, and churning out fake designer wares, yet we hear that the SME industry fund is still untapped due to lack of bankable ideas and projects.

These and many more problems are staring Nigerian's economy in the face. A lot still needs to be done and actualized for true sustainable economic development. What we are faced with here, is the fundamental societal obstacle which has to be dealt with on that level—if any success is to be achieved. The government needs to ensure policy continuity and stability, while the society needs to be reformed and reoriented about the related economic policies and strategies in order to improve the economical status of the nation. Information and orientation is very essential because successful economic development depends on adequate knowledge (Etudeko 1986, p.126). Besides, focusing attention on mobilization will ensure better utilization of domestic human and material resources, as well as ensuring that we start tapping into the growing intellectual and financial muscle of Nigerians at home and in the diaspora. The extent to which the Nigerian press has performed this function is the focus of this paper.

An Overview of NEEDS

Nigeria is expected to be the 25th largest economy in the world by 2020, superseding the economy of the current giant South Africa. In pursuit of this goal, precisely on the 15th of March 2004 in Abuja, the former president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, President Olusegun Obasanjo, launched the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS)—an economic strategy with an implementation plan and specific industry targets designed to rejuvenate the Nigerian economy into a leading African and global economy. NEEDS is a development strategy to consolidate on the gains of the first four years of Obasanjo's administration; unlock Nigeria's dormant potentials; and provide the base for the sustained development of the country. NEEDS signals a break with the past.

NEEDS is Nigeria's plan for prosperity. It is the people's way of letting the government know the kind of Nigeria they wish to live in, now, and in the future. It is the government's way of letting the people know how it plans to overcome the deep and pervasive obstacles to progress, that the government and the people have identified. It is also a way of letting the international community know where Nigeria stands—in the region and in the world—and how it wishes to be supported (National Planning Commission 2004).

Akande (2003: 9) noted that, with more than two decades of deterioration, Nigeria truly needs some sort of "crises management", not simply to grow its economy, but to avert total collapse of her body policy and infrastructure. This is what NEEDS is designed to achieve. The keywords in the programme are called "Triple R"—Rehabilitation, Revitalization, and Re-energization. NEEDS is all about concerted ideological reorientation and revamping of the public service, judiciary, education, healthcare system, and ailing industries; and it would be a stepping stone to achieving sustainable economic growth and social progress over a long term period.

The mission of Obasanjo's government was to use the instrumentality of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) as a nationally coordinated framework of action in close collaboration with the state governments and other stakeholders to consolidate the achievements of the first four years (1999-2003) and build a solid foundation for the attainment of Nigeria's long-term vision. Over the medium term, NEEDS will lay the foundation and achieve significant progress in the areas of wealth creation, employment generation, and poverty reduction.

Objectives of NEEDS

The objectives envisaged by 'NEEDS', as outlined by NEEDS National Planning Commission include:

- To restore agriculture to its former status as a leading sector in the economy in terms of its contribution to GDP, supply of raw materials, employment generation, source of export, local consumption, and hence, food security.
- Joblessness has resulted in a rising incidence of social ills among young people. NEEDS will target youth empowerment and development in order to reverse the negative consequences associated with the past pattern of development by expanding opportunities for vocational training and entrepreneurial development, providing facilities for sports and recreation (public sports facilities

and parks), and waging a sustained campaign against drug use and abuse, cultism, prostitution, and trafficking of women.

- To increase the accessibility of telecommunication to a wider range of Nigerians despite location, and develop a national communication and telecommunication backbone, and satellite, including a national multimedia super corridor.
- The tourism industry in Nigeria has great potentials for attracting foreign investment, generating employment, and earning foreign exchange for Nigeria. However, the industry is constrained by inadequate facilities in most of the established tourist centres in Nigeria. The primary focus of NEEDS in the tourism sector is to make Nigeria the preferred tourist destination in West Africa. The key target in the immediate term is to increase tourists arrivals into the country by 10% yearly.
- NEEDS envisages reforms that will transform the power sector into the one that is led by the private sector, with the role of government primarily in policy formulation and the establishment of an appropriate legal and regulatory framework. This objective has been actualized through the emergence of Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN).
- NEEDS seeks to fully integrate women by enhancing their capacity to participate in the economic, social, political, and cultural life of the country. To do so, the government will ensure equitable representation of women in the country in all aspects of national life by using affirmative action to ensure that women represent at least 30% of the workforce, where feasible.
- The goal of the NEEDS health component is to improve the health status of Nigerians in order to reduce poverty. The strategy will continue to emphasize the strengthening of preventive and curative primary healthcare services. The initiative will involve comprehensive health sector reforms, aimed largely at strengthening the national health system and enhancing the delivery of effective, efficient, good quality, and affordable health services.

- The Nigerian film industry has significant foreign exchange earning capacity. Recent reports indicate that some 2,000 Nigerian videos were rented or sold in a single month, in a single outlet in the United States. The potential market for Nigerian films is large, but the industry is held back by several constraints; low level of technological input in the industry, lack of access to adequate financing, lack of professionalism and inadequate human capacity, and so on. Therefore, NEEDS seeks to facilitate technological input in the production process, foster the development of a Nigerian version of Hollywood for film production, encourage the local manufacture of film production inputs, generate \$200 million in foreign exchange earnings by 2007 from the export of videos, and so on.
- The oil and gas sector is seen as an external sector, because there is no link between it and the other sectors of the economy. The key issues requiring attention include; absence of indigenous technical know-how, multiplicity of legislation governing operations in the sector; absence of a national gas infrastructure (national gas grid system), etc. However, NEEDS is designed to facilitate the implementation of a national gas grid by 2007, completely deregulate and liberalize the downstream petroleum sector; unbundled the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and privatize its downstream subsidiaries, and enable the Nigerian petroleum Development Company and a professionalized NNPC to compete as other oil companies around the world do.
- Nigeria has abundant solid mineral deposits. Some independent estimates indicate that the country's solid mineral deposits could provide more revenue, foreign exchange, and employment than the oil and gas sector do. Exploitation of these resources could provide a major force for growth and development. The NEEDS action plan will vigorously support exploration for base metals and precious and semi-precious stones. Informal sector mining activities will be formalized and supported to encourage sustainable production and create self-employment.

The Role of the Media

In a debate on policy and planning implementation, Deane et al. (2002) stipulates that the mass media (radio, television, newspapers, and magazines) are fundamental to development. The mass media

enable people to learn about issues as well as make their voices heard. They can exert a powerful influence, for good or for ill. Free, independent media are important to ensure freedom of speech (guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), promote democracy, good governance, peace and human rights, combat poverty and crime, inform people about issues, and enable them to participate in public debate. The media should ensure that the public is involved in defining development strategies, as well as help in obtaining widespread support for such strategies.

The media perform three basic functions—to entertain, educate, and inform. As educational tool, the media do not only impart knowledge, but can be a part of larger efforts (e.g., social marketing) to promote actions having social utility, (public relations tools); media assist organizations in achieving credibility and respect among public health workers, opinion leaders, stakeholders and other gatekeepers; and as advocacy tools, mass media assist leaders in setting a policy agenda, shaping debates about controversial issues, and gaining support for particular points of view.

The media represent a key component in the machinery of any campaign to mobilize social awareness and action. Increasingly, attention is being given to the need for corporate social responsibility actors—especially businesses—to engage journalists and editors with the message of development. Dunkerley (2003) noted that, “an independent media can boost economic development by promoting good governance and empowering citizens. It can make economies function better.” The media need to be shown the idea behind reform programmes. Reluctance on the part of the press to report on stories as regard economic development reform programmes can be attributed to three key factors: lack of understanding of the issue, lack of interest in a topic that is still not very visible, and lack of recognition by the media of its own role and responsibility. Coyne and Leeson (2004) further stress that:

The media is a key institutional mechanism for achieving a successful policy mix that promotes economic development. The development process—and specifically the adoption of ‘good’ policies—is characterized by a situation of conflict between political agents. Economic development is achieved when political games of conflict are turned into games of coordination, and a free media is one such means for achieving this (p.23)

A free press is not a luxury. It is at the core of equitable development. The media can expose corruption; keep a check on public policy by throwing a spotlight on government action; let people voice diverse opinions on governance and reform; and help build public consensus to bring about change. Such media help markets work better, facilitate trade, and transmit ideas and innovation across boundaries.

The media is also important for human development, bringing health and education information to remote villages in different countries. But as experience has shown, the independence of the media can be fragile and easily compromised. It is clear that to support development, the media need the right environment—in terms of freedoms, capacities, and checks and balances.

The Method

The method adopted in this study is content analysis. The study population comprised all issues of the *Guardian* and the *Punch* newspapers published between 2004 and 2006. These two newspapers were selected based on the fact that they are the two leading national newspapers. *The Guardian* is a favourite of the intellectuals and respected for its independent sober views while *The Punch*, the most widely read newspaper, seems to cater for the interest of all social groups (Olukoju 2004). A total of 192 issues were analysed from the newspapers selected; 96 issues from each of the newspapers. The researcher randomly selected a month from each quarter of the year for the three years, which makes a total of 4 months in a year and when multiplied by the three years, gave a total of 12 months. Eight issues were randomly selected from each of the 12 months, making a total of 192 issues for the two newspapers. The unit of analysis included any news stories, feature articles, opinions or editorials, special reports that mentioned NEEDS or SEEDS.

Result

Table1: Extent of Coverage given to NEEDS

Newspapers	Percentage
The Guardian (G)	76.9%
The Punch (P)	23%
Total	100% N=65

A total of 65 issues on "NEEDS" were reported; out of which 50 items were from *The Guardian* representing 76.9% and the remaining 15 items representing 23% from *The Punch* (Table 1).

Table 2: Distribution of Genres used in reporting NEEDS

Journalistic Genres	The Guardian	The Punch
Straight news (Sn)	(28 %)	(33 %)
Feature stories (Fs)	(52 %)	(53 %)
Opinion articles (Op)	(10 %)	(7 %)
Editorials (E)	-	(7 %)
Special reports (Sp)	(10 %)	-
Total	(100%) N=50	(100%) N=15

It is discovered that feature is mostly used with 52 and 53 per cents for *The Guardian* and *The Punch* respectively. Straight news came next in usage and then others followed (Table 2).

Table 3: Degree of prominence given to NEEDS

Page Placement	The Guardian	The Punch
Front-page (Fp)	(6 %)	(0 %)
Inside-pages (Ip)	(90 %)	(100%)
Back-page (Bp)	(4 %)	(0%)
Total	(100%) N=50	(100%) N=15

In terms of prominence given to NEEDS, our findings show that the programme was not give good prominence. Stories that appeared on the front page were regarded as prominent; stories on back pages were regarded as the next prominent ones after those on the front page; while stories that appeared on the inside pages were regarded as the least prominent. Most of the stories were buried in the inside pages of the newspapers; ninety (90) percent of the stories in *The Guardian*, as well as all the stories on NEEDS, by *The Punch* were found in the inside pages (Table 3).

Table 4: Slant of reports on NEEDS

Slant	The Guardian	The Punch
Favourable (F)	(76 %)	(87 %)
Unfavourable (U)	(6 %)	-
Neutral (N)	(18 %)	(10 3%)
Total	(100%) N=50	(100%) N=15

The result shows that, 76% and 87% of the reports were reported in favour of "NEEDS" by *The Guardian* and *The Punch* respectively, 6% of the reports in *The Guardian* was unfavourable while 18% and 2% were neutral in *The Guardian* and *the Punch* in that order.

Table 5: Sources of NEEDS' Reports

Sources	The Guardian	The Punch
In-house	(86 %)	(87 %)
External	(14 %)	(10 3%)
Total	(100%) N=50	(100%) N=15

Most of the reports were in-house sourced; 86% and 87% for *The Guardian* and *The Punch* newspapers respectively; and the external sources accounting for 13% and 2% in the same order (Table 4).

Discussion

As shown in the tables above, the newspapers coverage given to NEEDS was very low, compared with the volume of news that was reported daily. For example, *The Guardian* carries an average of 90 stories per day; when one examines this against the number of issues the papers analysed, that means, for the 96 issues sampled, *The Guardian* has carried nothing less than 8,640 stories. Then, for only 50 stories to be reported on NEEDS shows a gross underreportage of the programme. *The Punch* also devoted only 15 stories to the programme, which means, apart from underreporting the programme, one can also say that *The Punch* does not give attention to publicizing government policy. One would have expected *The Punch*, being the

most-widely read newspaper in Nigeria to be at the forefront of setting agenda for such a development-centred programme.

It is further confirmed that enough attention has not been given to the programme going by the placement of the stories in the newspapers. As earlier said, most of the stories on NEEDS are buried in the inside-pages of the newspapers. It thus means that the newspapers did not count the stories on NEEDS very significant—enough to be placed on the front page or even back page. However, it is interesting to know that the newspapers have positive attitude towards the programme since the stories about NEEDS were generally favourable.

It is also observed that of all the journalistic genres of the print media, 'feature' was mostly used; far above 'straight' news, 'opinion articles', and 'editorial'. That seems to be in order since, through 'feature', the details of NEEDS could be better explained to the readers. 'Feature' makes for comprehensive account of events and its good for explaining a process. However, the fact that only 10 percent and 1 percent of the stories in both *The Guardian* and *The Punch* respectively were opinion articles shows poor engagement of the public with the programme. In other words, it is either the people have not been informed or were not well educated about NEEDS that accounted for the low expression or comment about the programme by the populace.

The findings also show a direct sourcing of report on NEEDS by the newspapers. Most of the items were in-house sourced while only 14% (*The Guardian*) and 10% (*The Punch*) were of external sources. This may be as a result of the fact that NEEDS was a homegrown programme and therefore not like the previous foreign development programme adopted by the government.

Conclusion

The media is required to serve the economic system by providing information which will benefit the populace. In line with this, is the need for the media to set agenda for any development programme of the government. It follows then, that a programme like NEEDS requires active participation of the media to make it successful. Since it has been shown that the press has not given adequate coverage to NEEDS, there is need for the press to wake up to its responsibility. It is therefore necessary that adequate information is shared to ensure people's mobilization and participation toward the successful implementation of the programme, most especially as the second phase of the programme (NEEDS II) commences.

There is also the need to ensure enabling environment that will aid effective performance and media contribution to economic development. The environment will include media autonomy—the ability of the media sources to act without interference from the government. This is critical in its role as an effective mechanism for transforming situation of conflict to coordination. A legal provision is also very important. For example the Freedom of Information Bill will ensure availability of information and the ability of the media to use such information. In addition is the need for qualitative media that will guarantee good media management and array of journalists, editors, analysts, and researchers who are trained to efficiently and accurately find and analyse information.

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