



# Communicating *for* Development Purposes

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## **Indigenous Language Radio for Development Purposes**

**OYERO OLUSOLA S.**

### **Introduction**

The challenges of development have led to the realization that man himself is the centre of meaningful development. The old school's definition of development in terms of economic growth and industrialization has thus given way to a human dimension approach which stresses self-reliant growth, independence and expansion of human capacity to actualize his dreams. It is a full integration of human, economic, sociopolitical, cultural and environmental dimensions — a holistic approach to development.

The human dimension, which development has assumed, has, therefore, brought to the fore the imperative of communication in the development process. As noted by FAO (1994:5), communication is the key to human development and the thread that binds the people together. Moemeka (1991) also notes that development efforts cannot be successful without planned communication because its flow determines the direction and pace of dynamic social development.

Radio is a veritable medium which has provided a good access to communication for a large number of people, both literate and non-literate. Its advantage over other media lies in its relative simplicity, cheapness and ubiquity without dependence on electricity

supply. It is, therefore, believed that radio occupies a strategic position in the process of communication for development in the third world especially. This paper calls attention to the fact that development messages, packaged in the ornate style of indigenous language, can be better and more effectively communicated to people through the medium of radio and can (above other media) greatly enhance the development process.

### **The Goal of Development Communication**

Okunna (2002), notes that development communication has to do with mobilization of a people to have a positive change in their living conditions. Thus, people are provided with adequate knowledge and information so that they are persuaded, through sound reasoning, to change in a predetermined direction.

FAO (1998) stresses that communication can play a decisive role in promoting human development by stimulating people's awareness and participation and by improving their knowledge and capabilities. Communication allows individuals to express themselves effectively and helps them create an identity for themselves or their group. People develop a sense of community through communicating. They also communicate to share information and increase their knowledge. Also, through communication, there is the possibility of creating joint action, which can lead to improvement of the environment or situations.

### **Participation**

Participation is the active mass involvement of the citizens in the process of elaboration, implementation and follow-up of development plans (Adnan *et al* 1991:8). By this involvement, the people take up responsibilities to determine and shape their future. It starts from the conception of a development project, through to its implementation, follow-up and evaluation.

Servaes and Arust (1992) underscore the importance of participation by saying that a development goal cannot be realized without the development endeavour beginning in the context of the target beneficiary. They observe that it is not because the target beneficiaries are the foremost experts in macro-level planning but they are often the most qualified to decide how, or if, a given project's planning and objectives apply at the local level. They emphasize that

"participation is not a supplementary mechanism "diffused" to expedite external agendas, or a means to an end. It is a legitimate goal in itself" (Servaes and Arust, 1992:18).

Participation is unique because it is a common denominator for both development and communication. Participatory communication — a two-way sharing of information among communication equals — is necessary for participatory development. Because participation is common to both development and communication, there has emerged another concept — participatory development communication. As stressed by Rockefeller Foundation, quoted in Coldevin (2001), access to and control of information sources are essential for people to participate fully in decisions affecting their lives and communities, adding that sustained social change is impossible without the full participation of the target of change.

FAO, cited in Richardson (1997), while maintaining the centrality of participation to development and communication, states that:

People oriented development can only realize its full potential if rural people are involved and motivated and if information and knowledge is shared. Communication caters for the human dimensions of development; it establishes a dialogue with rural people, involves them in the planning of their own development, provides information as a basis for social change and conveys the knowledge and skills required to improve the quality of their life. (p. 14)

Here, the point being made is that development cannot occur without participation, however, it is communication that can bring about the needed participation.

### **Language and Culture**

Language is primarily a means of conveying meanings from one person to another (Wolff 1973:19). This is very similar to Pearson and Nelson's (1994:6) definition of communication as the process of understanding and sharing meaning. This indicates clearly that language is a means of communication.

It is important to note that language does not exist independent of culture, that is, it is the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives (Bamidele 1999). In other words, language is situated within a sociocultural setting or community. It is an integral part of culture, a reflection of many features of a given culture. Like culture itself, it is a learned

behaviour, which can be facilitated or enhanced through direct or indirect context and acculturation. (Akindele and Adegbite 1992:2)

Wallwork, cited in Bamidele (1999:183), states that language is more than a means of communication, it is used:

- for phatic communion, i.e. as a social regulator.
- for ceremonial purposes
- as an instrument of action
- to keep records
- to convey order and information
- to influence people
- to enable self-expression, and
- to embody or enable thought.

Bamidele states further that it is through language that man plans, instructs and evaluates his programme — language plays an important role in national development as it “fosters understanding, unity and sense of belonging among the various groups that constitute a nation”. Chafe (1968:52), asserts that language is not just one part of culture but an unusually important part because it serves culture. It is clear as crystal then that the language of a people cannot be divorced from their culture.

### **Centrality of Indigenous Language in Development Communication**

It has been established (Bamidele, 1999) that language plays a significant role in communication; it is a means of communication. Though there exist other means of communication, language still remains a peculiar endowment of man that makes him unique among other living creatures.

The inseparable nature of language from culture underscores the significance of indigenous language in communication. A person's indigenous language or mother tongue is a part and carrier of his culture, as well as his means of communication. As noted by Ujomu (2001:169), “the meaning ascribed to specific concepts or statements in one language are defined by the nationality of the culture in question”. When the indigenous language of a person is used to communicate to him, the consequence is that he will have greater understanding than when another language is used.

Wallace (1996) asserts that cultural context and intimacy with a

culture will give a deeper meaning to the understanding of language and the circumstance in which it occurs will determine believability or sense of reality. Berreman (1968) has also observed that:

People of different culture and different languages categorize their experiences and the world around them differently, and they verbalize them in different ways. Literal translations of words for objects, ideas, attitudes and beliefs are often impossible. Even close approximations fail to communicate culturally specific connotations .... (p. 363)

Oladipo (1995:404) also shares Berreman's view by saying that the meaning of a linguistic expression cannot be established outside the context of the form of social interaction which shapes it.

Wallace (1996) emphasizes the point that native language, when used in the media, writing or the arts is powerful in bringing about

teach basic technology. Folarin and Mohammed (1996:110) have also called attention to the fact that indigenous language press can be a veritable instrument in mobilizing the vast majority, who are unlettered in the English language, to be involved in the political process.

### **The Role of Radio in Development**

When radio was introduced in Africa about eight decades ago, little was it realized that it would be a veritable instrument for development. It later became obvious that radio has great potential as an instrument for promoting national development and integration.

Of all the media of mass communication available in Africa, radio is significantly suitable for the people in the continent. Radio can be described as an ideal means of mass communication in a third world country like Nigeria because it provides access to communication for a large number of people, both literate and non-literate, and it is very cheap to own and maintain without dependence on electricity supply.

Besides, Folarin (1990) notes that radio messages, apart from breaking the barrier of illiteracy, reach all people without discrimination; and demand less intellectual exertion from the listener than print media. Radio messages are immediate and have multiplying effect. A single radio message may be received simultaneously by millions of people and a single radio set can serve a group of people.

Jamison and McAnany (1978) have pointed out the role of radio to motivate, inform, teach and change behaviour in the development process. Radio can be used to motivate a country politically towards national unity, or to arouse the public against a common external enemy, or to motivate a group towards a self-development activity. Given the ability of radio to overcome the barriers of distance and illiteracy, it is a very powerful medium for promoting national integration by fostering national identity through communication of national anthem, slogan and campaign (Ansah 1991:35).

Radio has, over the years, played the role of information provider through news, messages about the availability of social services, and announcements concerning an event of importance to the audience. National objectives, programmes and aspirations can be made known and explained to the people through radio in order to have their support and forge a sense of belonging.

Radio can also be used to teach in non-formal education in subject

areas specific to the development needs of individual regions of a country. Development related knowledge on agronomic practices, public health, personal hygiene and nutrition, community organization, and so forth can be transferred to individuals through the medium of radio.

Changing behaviour is the most difficult goal to achieve, yet radio provides the only reliable communication system that reaches large portions of African populations, and thus constitutes a potent weapon in behaviour change process. Jamison and McAnany (1978:65) have reasoned that radio can more effectively provide exact instructions or directions for behaviour change when few people are involved and they have a two-way capacity, but even when instructions are for large masses of people and the message is one-way only, radio often functions for instructing people in certain behaviours.

Radio also has the potential to encourage profound mutual understanding and can even help to forge social relationships (Coldevin 2001:8). This can facilitate the process of nation building by inviting people with similar and opposing views to have interaction, debates and exchange ideas, out of which other people will learn and channel a course for national consensus.

With specific reference to rural areas, radio can fulfil a number of critical functions. FAO, (1998: 11) states that radio is:

- an important mechanism for rapid diffusion of development information in a diversity of languages and to widespread, often remote geographical areas;
- a channel for interactive communication, for dialogue and debate on the major issues of rural development;
- a platform for democratic and pluralistic expression of the opinions, needs and aspirations of rural communities;
- a tool for cultural expression and entertainment, and a means of collecting, preserving and enhancing the oral and musical heritage of rural communities;
- a medium for collecting local information on social issues, which is essential for defining, planning and implementing development efforts;
- a means of raising public awareness and motivation; and
- a tool which, combined with other media, can be used for training and the transfer and exchange of knowledge and technologies.

### **Exploring Traditional Media and Internet through Radio for Development**

An indigenous language radio can be used to harness the potentials of traditional media to bring about change and development. The traditional or oramedia are grounded in indigenous culture, produced and consumed by grassroots members of traditional societies. According to Ugboajah (1989: 233), they reinforce the values of the society. They are "visible cultural features, often quite strictly conventional, by which social relationships and a world view are maintained and defined".

As underscored by FAO (1998:8), traditional folk media are cultural resources that accumulate indigenous knowledge, experience and expressions passed down from generation to generation. Woven into proverbs and poems, songs and dances, puppet plays and stories, rhythms and beats, they are embedded with a strong sense of cultural identity, which can be a potent force for development. In many cases, these media are the traditional conduits of indigenous knowledge, experience and culture. When they are creatively used, these cultural resources can be a subtle and effective way of introducing development ideas and messages.

Drama, folk-tales, oral poetry and music, when aired through the medium of radio, laden with rich development messages and ideas, have great possibilities to mobilize people for development. Soola (1999), points out that:

the theatre as an interactive, participatory tool in development constitutes an asset in mobilizing and galvanizing people into action for sustainable environment. Using local language, or even preferably its dialect variant; idioms and symbolism, popular theatre, laden with environmental awareness messages can be used to enlist the local/ community people in theatrical performance (Soola, 1999: 35).

Similarly, the rich resources available on the internet can be effectively exploited through radio, thus eradicating the hitherto anxiety over the possibility of a "digital divide" and the knowledge gap which internet has created, owing to the limited access to it, particularly among the predominantly illiterate and poor, grassroot communities.

As stressed by Coldevin (2001:9):

by connecting community radio stations to the internet and

training broadcasters to collect and adapt information to local socio-economic contexts, rural communities can have access to global knowledge and information to improve agriculture productivity, profitability and food security.

Such type of project proposed by FAO to link rural radio stations of southern Mali to the Internet is aimed at ensuring that information is collected, translated and adapted for broadcasting to rural audiences in formats and languages they easily comprehend. An important component of the project will be the training of the information specialists, not only in Internet use but also in information management and marketing to ensure the widest promotion of the ICTs tools and the sustainability of the system.

### **Empirical Justification**

A study of an indigenous language radio (Radio Lagos 107.5 fm-Tiwantiwa) conducted by Oyero, examined the significance of indigenous language usage in broadcasting and the public preference for it. It also investigated the extent to which the radio enhances community development and whether the public perceived the radio as contributing to development.

The survey shows that the use of indigenous language is very significant because it gives the people better understanding and meaning of radio messages. More than 70% of the respondents agreed that they understand radio messages better in their own native language and that it makes for ease of assimilation and message recall. They also indicated that they have a good feeling of enjoyment and sense of satisfaction when listening to radio messages in their mother tongue.

Over 72% of the respondents also indicated preference for indigenous language radio; even the literate audience members prefer listening and expressing themselves in their mother tongue. Besides, it was discovered that indigenous language radio will, largely, enhance community development by promoting the economy, good moral values, culture, agriculture, political development and news dissemination. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents expressed satisfaction with the performance of the radio, while about 90% indicated that the radio has capacity for contributing significantly to development.

## Conclusion

It has been shown that language is situated within a cultural context and is in fact, inseparable from it. Messages are, therefore, interpreted according to the cultural context of the language of communication. This affects comprehension and assimilation and even believability of such messages. Indigenous language, therefore, when used to package development-oriented messages, spiced by the richness of oramedia and aired through radio medium, has great impact on the audience.

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