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COMMUNICATION, POLITICIANS AND TRUE DEMOCRACY

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Introduction

Nigeria has gone through a chequered history in its relatively short span of existence as an independent nation. Next year will mark the centenary of the amalgamation of the Northern and the Southern Protectorates to form the entity known as Nigeria. In this period, the country has cascaded through different phases of experience – colonial subjugation, inter and intra-ethnic wrangling, a bloody military *coup d'état*, a civil war, then, a long spell of military rule, return to democratic dispensation and an uneasy co-habitation among the various ethnic components of the Federation.

These anomalies have been spiced with large doses of maladministration, nepotism, corruption in high and low places and general discontentment. In this period (from 1914 to date) also, Nigerians have suffered lack, want and abject poverty in the midst of abundance. Morale has dipped and hopelessness has held sway, where prosperity and life abundant ought to reign. Youth unemployment is on the upward swing while the basic values of hard work, honesty and commitment, for which our founding fathers were reputed, have almost become alien to us. Indiscipline and base values have taken the pride of place and they have required enormous an amount of resources to keep in check.

But, in spite of all these, God has remained loving, kind and faithful to us in Nigeria.

If the above preamble suggests that as a country we have stepped out of line in our march towards justice, fairplay and the equitable distribution of our God-given resources, the next several pages will attempt to help us to trace where we have missed it and how we can combine the key concepts in our topic of today, **not only to retrace our steps but, also, launch out to build a more just, egalitarian, prosperous and peaceful society.**

Three major concepts feature in our topic of today. They are *communication, politicians and true democracy*. These concepts need to be put in context before we go any further.

Communication: At the risk of being labeled a reductionist, I make bold to say that lack of adequate or appropriate communication, sometimes, total lack of it, lies at the root of many of our problems in this country. I have always believed that if proper communication takes place amongst us, more than half of our problems would probably not have existed. We would have understood ourselves so well that we would have learnt to respect one another enough not to want to take the other person for granted, no matter his or her status or station in life. We would have known that no matter how closely related we were, we would not hold the same views about life or any situation for that matter. Therefore, we would have appreciated the need for tolerance of one another's limitations and we would have known how to circumvent such in order to keep harmonious relationships. Human foibles notwithstanding, we still would have fared far better than we have done.

Our inability to understand the importance and relevance of communication in the process of our daily interactions is responsible mainly for our acquisitive instinct that always propels us towards unabashed monopoly. We want to appropriate what belongs to the commonwealth to ourselves and our relations and manouvre others out of the rather few opportunities they may have. Even at meetings or gatherings, it is always the desire of most people to dominate the situation, as though they have the monopoly of knowledge. Indeed, God, who created us, knows us so well that He, in His infinite wisdom, decided to endow us with different gifts, skills and aptitudes.

However, man, in his narrow mindedness and greed has failed to see the wisdom of God in His complementarity agenda for his creation. The world is today in so much turmoil because we care less about knowing the mind of God in order that we may know His desire for us and do His will.

Importance of Communication

Communication is the most important feature of human interactions, at whatever level and in whatever field of human endeavour. God intended for us to communicate with ourselves without let or hindrance. Indeed, the scripture tells us that He communicated with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening (Gen. 3: 8). It was when man decided to rival God that He disorganised his thought at Babel and caused the people there to speak in diverse tongues (Gen. 11: 6-8). Even then, God provided an avenue for learning so that as we do today, some of us can learn the languages of other groups. If God had not wanted us to understand one another, He would not have gone that far with man.

What is Communication?

Unfortunately, many of us misunderstand mere noise or information for communication. Yes, information is a major ingredient in the communication process, but it is not communication. Communication takes place only when meanings are shared. It should be noted that communication is not synonymous with agreement. It could even portray irreconcilable differences. Communication produces understanding of each other's position on the subject of concern or interest. Communication is, however, different from information or persuasion, two concepts that are often confused with communication. Information or persuasion is unidirectional; that is, it flows from the person who has a message to give (message source/sender) to the Person whose attention is needed or who needs to perform a function or carry out a directive (message receiver). Communication is bi or multi-directional. Exchange of ideas, spontaneous or delayed¹, is a notable feature of communication. The figures (Figs. 1 and 2) below illustrate the point I am trying to make.

¹Response (feedback) could be immediate as in a face-to-face situation or delayed as in letter to the editor, a rejoinder or other forms of reactions.

Fig. 1

Message

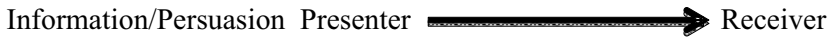
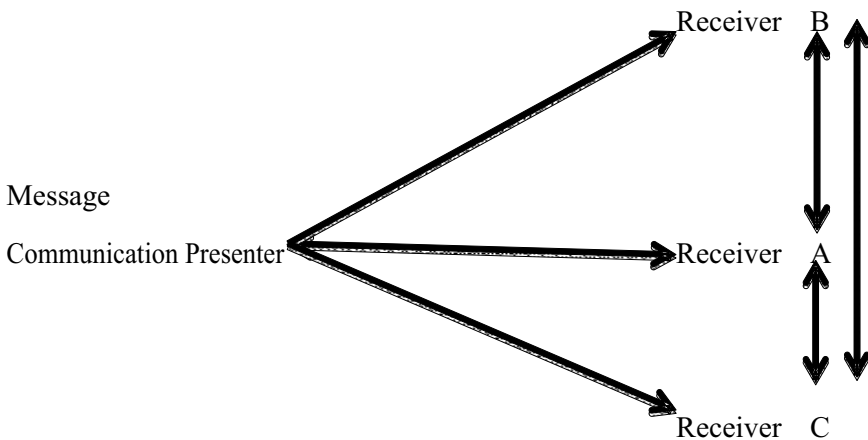


Fig. 2



The above diagrams illustrate my conception of the flow path of appropriate communication. Figure 1 indicates what happens when information or persuasion is intended. It is a one-way traffic.

However, when communication takes place, the politician should be able to present his/her message to any of the receivers A, B and C while each of them should have direct access to him/her and unrestricted access to one another. This will facilitate thorough discussion of the issues at stake and reach a consensus of agreement or disagreement. Whatever the case, there will be general understanding of the issues at

stake and the position of the commonwealth. This situation allows for negotiation and modification of positions, should that become necessary. It also allows enduring conclusions and decisions based on the negotiation. It seriously minimises the possibility of corruption as the policies and actions that follow are direct results of consensus. It also fosters a sense of belonging which promotes cooperation and loyalty among stakeholders.

Communication is different from information or persuasion. What most of our leaders do is to give information, a euphemism for “order,” “directive” or “decisions” already taken behind us, without consulting us, and with minimal regard to how they would affect us. Sometimes they try to persuade us, in order not to reject their decisions when they sense that we may oppose them. Neither of these is communication. Communication, on the other hand, is transactional. It takes place with the spirit of give and take. It involves dialogue, where the parties involved present their positions and bargaining ensues. It does not succeed in an atmosphere of force or coercion. It flourishes only in an atmosphere of freedom and mutual respect for each other's rights and feelings. While information may sometimes lead to fear, confusion and hardening of position, communication on the other hand, engenders confidence, cooperation and a sense of belonging. Communication does not necessarily mean an agreement. It does mean, however, understanding each other's position. It means the removal of ambiguities and clarification of issues. Communication also breeds accommodation, trust and believability.

Our politicians will actually achieve a lot more of their desires, if they just choose to communicate rather than to inform, direct or impose their views or decisions on the people. By that choice, they will be in touch with the people, know their needs and be adequately informed to serve them better. The people, on the other hand, will be positioned not only to understand their leaders, but also to appreciate their limitations, sympathise, or even empathise with them and minimise

their demands for immediate reward on their investment of votes that brought them to office. The nation would be better for it because there would be more harmonious relationships between the led and their leaders.

One politician that really took communication with the people to a higher pedestal in this country is Alhaji Kayode Jakande, the first civilian governor of Lagos State. During his tenure, he held court in his Ilupeju house from about 7 or 8 p.m. daily, when he returned from his office, till between 2 and 3 a.m. the following day, depending on how many people were present each day. He listened patiently to every person and took copious notes of their complaints and observations. He would give the notes for each person to any commissioner or special adviser present to pass on to the officer in charge of that particular issue for a reaction, which he would ask the citizen to come for in 48 hours. Some even brought their petty domestic problems to him. He listened with equal rapt attention and still requested an appropriate officer of his government to look into the matter and report back not later than 48 hours. It was not long after he became governor before a large hall had to be attached to the house for the use of those who came for consultations daily.

One effect of such open administration was the free intelligence that people gathered for him. He moved about freely, sometimes without the trappings of security. He was fond of going to projects sites to assess the progress of work, against which he often assessed reports his officers produced in response to his directives to provide answers to people's complaints or requests.

Politicians

A politician is defined as a political leader or political figure, who is involved in influencing public policy and decision making. This

² Some people argued that he brought such personal touch to governance because he was a journalist. I believe he still would have run his administration the way he did were he not formerly a journalist.

³ That was why he was nick-named "Action Governor".

includes people who hold decision-making positions in government and people who seek those positions, whether by means of election, inheritance, coup d'état, **appointment, electoral fraud, conquest**, divine right, or other means (Wikipedia). Other definitions of the word (politician) include: “One who seeks personal or partisan gain, **often by scheming and maneuvering**” (*The Freedictionary.com*); and “A seeker or holder of public office, **who is more concerned about winning favour or retaining power than about maintaining principle** (*Dictionary.com*). All emphases are mine.

From the above definitions, we see that politicians are always engaged in contests and they may not always have scruples about their actions. To them, the end will always justify the means. They engage in political activities by choice. In other words, they volunteer to engage in politics.

They are the persons who have “volunteered” to look after our interests in governance so that we would be free to pursue other interests. It is important to note the concept of *volunteering* in my discussion of politicians. Their services, therefore, ought to be rendered without strings, so long as they are duly remunerated by the people and the government. The electorate compensates them by willingly surrendering its mandate to them to exercise on its behalf for an agreed period of time. The citizens pay them indirectly as they pay their taxes. Government on its part remunerates them for their time and their services by prescribing a range of benefits for them. It, thus, becomes obvious that politicians are not doing the citizens a favour by going up to the parliament to legislate the way our lives are controlled. Although they are supposed to bring order to society through legislations, they have been adequately rewarded for their services by the privileges society confers on them and the remunerations they collect for the services they render. Unless they perform their duties to the satisfaction of the electorate, they stand

to be debriefed at the expiration of their time. Here lies the sovereignty of the electorate.

A political office, therefore, is not supposed to be a do-or-die affair as we have come to know it in Nigeria and other developing countries of the world.

In this paper, we shall be looking at how well Nigerian politicians understand and play their roles in relation to their obligations to those who put them in power.

True Democracy

Democracy is a nebulous concept that people bandy about with little or no effort at all to understand what it really means and what is required for it to be present in a society.

The *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (new edition) defines democracy as:

- *A system of government in which everyone in the country can vote to elect its members;
- *A country that has a government which has been elected by the people of the country; and
- *A situation or system in which everyone is equal and has the right to vote, make decisions etc.

On the other hand, the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines democracy as:

- *A system of government by all the people of a country, usually through representatives whom they elect, thought of as allowing freedom of speech, religion and political opinion; and
- *Fair and equal treatment of each other by citizens, without social class divisions.

Worthy of note in these two sets of definitions are the presumptions of equality of citizens and their freedoms as enshrined in the United Nations charter of human rights and in the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria.

Aims and Objectives of Democratic Philosophy

Justice, fairness and equitable access to national resources are some of

the aims and objectives of the democratic philosophy. Others include basic fundamental rights enshrined in the United Nation's charters. These include freedoms of association, worship, movement, right to life and right to protection of life and property from wanton attack and destruction, the freedom to hold and express an opinion, no matter how incongruent with others' opinions or how unreasonable it may seem. Another element of democracy that is of interest to us here is the right to vote and to be voted for. Embedded in this right is the freedom to choose whom to vote for without coercion or intimidation. A major platform for these rights and freedoms is the rule of law. This means that all citizens, regardless of status, position or office, are or should be equal before the law.

Preferential treatment and undue attention to position in the dispensation of justice, treatment of offenders and distribution of resources and privileges are, therefore, antithetical to true democratic practice. Also, transparency and accountability in governance and business conducts are expected to be taken for granted.

A country where transparency is frequently an issue, where bribery and corruption are endemic and where the rule of law is conveniently ignored when it suits the occasion, can hardly be described as truly democratic, in spite of pretences to the contrary. Fear, threats and intimidation -- active inhibitors of the freedoms of expression and action -- are not good bedfellows with democracy.

To what extent does the situation in Nigeria fit the democratic picture painted above? The scenario that plays out on the Nigerian political scene cannot be said to be in conformity with the practice of true democracy.

A country where policy inconsistencies are the order of the day; where youth unemployment grows by leaps and bounds; where the dignity of labour is disregarded; where unearned wealth and affluence are flaunted to the annoyance of those working hard but yet have not "made it"; where basic amenities are not within the reach of the majority; where good education and healthcare are simply

unaffordable; where bribery and corruption are choking the majority of the people to death; and where insecurity, among myriads of other social maladies, is unrelenting, can hardly be said to be a fertile ground for true democratic development.

Inappropriate Communication and True Democracy

The lack of useful communication from our politicians or the unwillingness on their part to communicate beneficially has resulted in the stunted growth and development of appropriate democratic culture in Nigeria. This has also affected many facets of our national life. Those who govern us do what they like with impunity. The majority of the people who bear the brunt of the misrule that goes on in our land have not been cultured or empowered to ask questions and demand explanations when things do not seem not right. We have seen small pockets of super-wealthy Nigerians among large populations of impoverished citizens. Because of acute poverty, which inadequate communication and corruption have fostered, a situation of dependence has existed between the few rich and the majority poor. Consequently, it has been easy for the powerful minority to subjugate, oppress and suppress the hapless majority. Nowhere has this been more eloquently demonstrated than in the conduct of elections in this country.

As shown in the comparative table below, the will of the millions of the electorate has always been subverted by the whims and caprices of the ruling class. For example, on occasions when the electorate had said they would not vote for certain political office holders because of their non-performance, they ended up having the same officials foisted on them. It is for the same reason that the same leaders keep dominating the Nigerian political scene, no matter their ages or record of misdeeds.

Table 1: 2008, 2010 and 2011 data on whether the electorate would vote again for their chairmen

Response	Percentage 2008	Percentage 2010	Percentage 2011
Yes	47.3	28.9	15.3
No	24.9	34.6	51.1
–	27.8	36.5	33.6
Total n =	100% 5676	100% 4628	100% 2512

Source: Findings of surveys supervised by the author in 2008, 2010 and 2011

Thus, we see poverty, intimidation and threats of denial of amenities forcing the people to remain subdued against their wishes. We have been told in several surveys by Nigerians that they would vote in elections as they would be directed by their leaders. Unfortunately, these are people from localities that have not witnessed significant changes over the years, particularly in semi-urban and rural areas, despite rosy electioneering promises. The interesting thing is the sudden change of perception and attitude of the electorate toward public officials once there is a change of fortunes in the life of a political office holder. Politicians, who manipulate the people, always peter into irrelevance. The same persons who had hailed them and sung their praises to high heavens often were the first to condemn them and give damning information, true or false, about their perceived misdeeds in office.

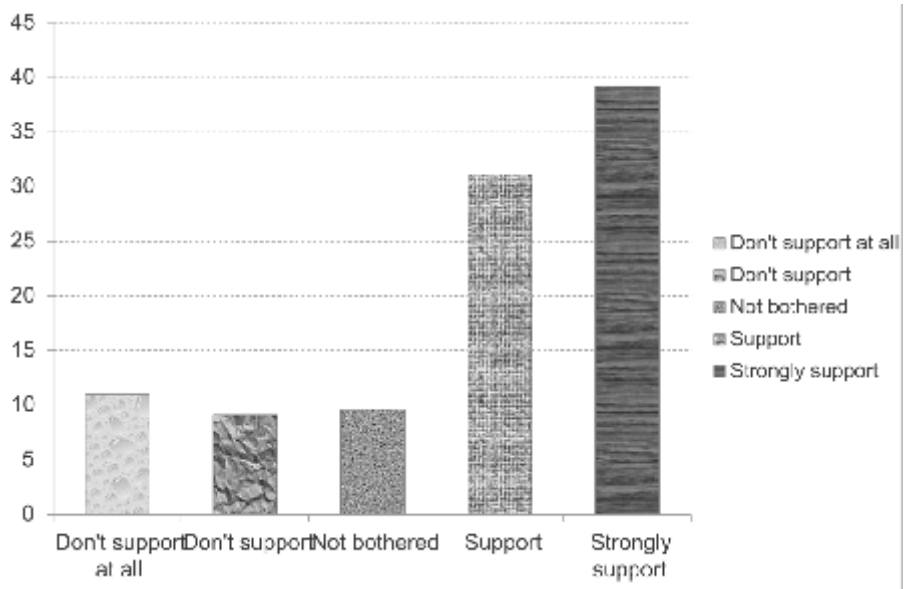
Because this has been the pattern of reactions of people who have had to be coerced or cajoled into performing acts or adopting behaviours, either because of the fear of punishment or the expectation of rewards from people in authority, one would have expected that political leaders would have learnt necessary lessons. Evidence, of course, has shown that behaviours that derived from real understanding and appreciation of issues have a tendency to become permanent and enduring.

Although the role of poverty in creating dependency has been mentioned, it is important to note also that merely giving information, either to persuade (as in advertising), to extract a behaviour (as in voting) or to misinform or disinform (as in causing mischief or confusion) instead of communicating, only produces temporary gains. Politicians are often under the mistaken impression that the people do not know the difference or that they would accept any message so long as it is coated in the “sugar” or “honey” of manipulation or misinformation. This is not true at all. In such situations, people only "comply" to avoid punishment or to gain a favour or an advantage. As soon as the source of the threat is removed or the dispenser of the favour is no longer in a position to do so, the people would revert to their old ways.

This was amply demonstrated during the military era when, for instance, sheds, kiosks and market wares in Tejuosho, Yaba and Oshodi, were frequently confiscated or destroyed to discourage street trading. As soon as the officials turned their back, the traders were back on the streets, rebuilding their stalls or displaying their wares on the roads. In contradistinction, the queue culture that the Buhari/Idiagbon military junta introduced has survived till today. There are also recent examples of what happens when the people understand the full implications of an action or policy. A survey was conducted in Lagos to gauge people's reaction to the demolition of some structures the government described as illegal because they were built on drainage channels. As Table 2 below shows, an overwhelming majority of those interviewed supported the action when the contrary had been expected. Obviously, the experiences of flooding that the people had had in the past had sensitised them to the consequences of blocking drainage alignments.

Also, the Ogun State Government has demolished more property than, perhaps, any other State government in this country, in its current effort to reconstruct roads in all the four political divisions of the state. Yet, there has been little or no opposition to the demolitions. What has the government done right? It is worth finding out.

Chart 1: Level of support for Lagos State Government's demolition of illegal structures



Do Nigerian Politicians Communicate With the Electorate?

Going by the findings of surveys conducted in this country by this lecturer from 1979, the answer to the above question must be in the negative.

Because of the peculiar nature of politics in Nigeria, politicians do not often feel or see the need to communicate with those whose mandate they need and often seek. Most Nigerian politicians think they can ride on the goodwill and or prowess of their political parties or political mentors to victory. Many think they can buy the votes. Not a few believe that they can rig their way to victory, whatever may be the cost. From whichever school, the belief is the same: **there is no point wasting time to communicate with the electorate.** Some politicians had in the past said that whether or not people voted for them, they would win. And they “won,” evidently without the people's votes.

One of the consequences of being impervious to the sensitivities of the electorate is that the people soon lose trust in the politicians and the politicians' credibility nose-dives. The question therefore, is, “If the people do not trust politicians, why do they vote for them?”

Why Politicians Keep Winning

As explained in the preceding paragraphs, most of the times, those who occupied elective offices in Nigeria did not always win through the ballot box. In some instances, elections were prevented from holding and yet winners were declared; in other instances, ballot boxes were swapped on the way to collating centres; massive pre-election thumb-printing of ballot papers occurred; violence and several other electoral malpractices took place. In effect, the wrong people, often not the choice of the electorate, found their way into political offices.

Of course, they did not hold allegiance to the people because with or without them “they won their elections.” Also, the obligation to account to the people was absent because they owed no duty to those who were really not instrumental to their victories. Thus, we see that the need for genuine communication between the politician and the people is not always there. If at all there is a next time, when the services of the voters will be required, always at election times, of course, all the politicians have to do is to print posters, make promises

that are never intended to be kept and, perhaps, mount one or two rallies where the electorate can be talked down to. Few, if any, opportunities are created during the tenure of many politicians to explain issues to the people they represent and to listen to what they need or have to say. When the voters did not know the political office seekers they voted for, how would they ever be able to communicate with them, once in office?

At a workshop recently in Abeokuta for newly elected local government chairmen and other functionaries at that level, some chairmen confessed that they ran away from their offices in order to avoid the pressure of demands from their supporters. A similar confession was made at another seminar in Lagos State a couple of years earlier.

Genuine Communication and True Democracy

Genuine communication must entail exchange of ideas, if it is interpersonal and must have a feedback loop, if it involves large, scattered and heterogeneous audiences. It usually leads to consensus either of agreement or disagreement.

If effective communication is the wheel on which democracy moves, there can be no virile democracy if communication is lacking between the political class -- the custodians of true democracy -- and the people. For instance, effective communication would not lead to making promises that the politician does not intend to honour. Rather, it would create a situation that would foster better understanding and appreciation of the politician's challenges and limitations while he or she would be adequately briefed of the needs and aspirations of those who have entrusted their lives to his/her care.

The lack of adequate communication between the leaders and the led has resulted in the lack of confidence in government and politicians that we all witness today. If genuine information is made available to the public through genuine communication, people would be in a better position to make decisions that they think are in their own best interests.

Part of the problem is the erroneous impression politicians have about the potency of information. Many of them believe that all they need to do is to put out their information and the electorate would have no choice than to do their bidding. Where this fails, they think that money or, sometimes, coercion would produce the desired effect. It does not work that way. Where democracy works, leaders do not assume that the people ought to know. They spend money and quality time to engage the people on issues of concern to them. In such climes, the fortunes of political office seekers depend on how convincing and effective they are in arguing their cases and defending their positions.

In Nigeria, the situation is different. In many cases, Nigerians vote without ever seeing their candidates once or getting to know them through other means. This phenomenon has repeated itself since 1979 when the first attempt to find out if people knew their candidates began in Nigeria⁴. A great majority of the people polled across the country then claimed that they did not know the candidates nor understand the issues they were canvassing on the platforms of their various political parties. That was even when politicians seeking elections into the legislative houses at the Federal and state levels were more serious and committed than the present generation of politicians.

When people do not know the persons they are voting for, how would such political leaders become accountable to them? Communication with such leaders is almost impossible because they do not feel obligated to the people in the first instance, particularly if there is a strong leader, a near demigod, behind the political party.

The entrance of citizens' journalism into the mass communication arena should not be regarded as a solution to the problem of communication versus information that we are discussing. While the veracity and importance of social communication infrastructure cannot be denied, it creates a cacophony of disconnects and

⁴ *The first national opinion polls conducted before the 1979 general elections in Nigeria by "Punch Opinion Polls" (POP), initiated by this presenter.*

precipitates crises that are capable of leaving a country in greater chaos than non-communication may even ignite. The Arab Spring is an example of what can easily result. That is not the kind of situation a country in search of rapid transformation from underdevelopment to rapid development should promote. Of course, if our politicians and journalists acquiesce by doing and condoning evil -- by not taking the people into account when deciding their future -- that is what they will get.

Communication leads to internalization of values (*emphasis is mine*). On the other hand, information or persuasion could be misleading or false. It presents the views the communicator wants his/her audience to know and accept; whereas, decisions arising from communication come from the crucible of debate and disputations and they are, therefore, more likely to be acceptable to the generality of the people. While information is always unidirectional, communication is always bi- or multidirectional, depending on the number of people involved in the matter (see Figs. 1 & 2).

However, if social communication is effectively managed, it could serve the end of communication by virtue of its instantaneity. Therefore, its utility should never be discarded.

Organised Public Hearings by National and State Assemblies

More of the public hearings that the National and State Assemblies sometimes conduct on some national issues should be organised for the input of the general public on local, state and national issues. The problem with these national fora, where the ordinary people ought to have their say in how the polity should be shaped, is that they may not always be sincere. Sometimes the decisions appear to have been predetermined even before the fora are convened. A genuine attempt to carry the electorate along in the policy formulation and decision

making processes is one that must be encouraged and practised at all times before major national policies are formulated. To reduce cost, legislators could be asked to go to their constituencies, if they have functional constituency offices, to organise these hearings since allowance has already been made for such wider consultations at the constituency level. Unless this vital legislative process is built into the framework of those who represent us in the various legislative houses, Nigerians would continue to be shortchanged by their elected representatives as they continue to think for them and take decisions that are not in their interests. It is the only way to convince us that they are sincere and committed and are not self-serving. Apart from such fora, occasionally organised by committees of the State and National Assemblies, the people's representatives themselves ought to, as a matter of duty, hold consultations regularly with their constituents in order to hear from them and to report back to the people their score cards of contributions to, and achievements on, local, state and national matters of interest to their electors.

This is why constituency offices and allowances to run them are provided for the legislators. Transparency and accountability dictate that they should procure those offices, staff them adequately and use them for what they are meant.

If our legislators adopt this reporting system, it is definite that greater due diligence would be applied to government business. One sometimes wonders where our elected officials go that their seats in the assemblies, particularly the National Assembly, are always so vacant during parliamentary sessions, even at times when crucial national issues are being debated. It is doubtful that if those who sent them there would always ask them where they went and the quality of their contributions to debates and law making, legislators would not take so much for granted. Government's culture of silence and nonchalance is making communication between the governed and their governors almost nonexistent. I have monitored the activities of

some of our representatives in the National Assembly, for instance, and I have scarcely seen them shown on TV or heard them make contributions to debates. Yet, the nation spends so much on them in terms of salaries, allowances and other perquisites of office.

For true democracy to take firm root in Nigeria there must be sincerity of purpose, commitment, honesty and patriotic fervour in the conduct of government and organisational businesses. Democracy must be understood to mean a lot of personal sacrifice, service to the community, transparency and accountability in dealings and uncommon tolerance of opposing views. It requires devotion to duty and unwavering commitment to ideals on the part of those entrusted with the destiny of the nation. Democracy, which must be participatory, if it is to be beneficial, can only survive in a marketplace of ideas, where truth and falsehood must constantly engage in contests (John Stuart Mill, 1859; Doob, 1961. pp. 143 - 145).

Persuasion, the type of communication Nigerian politicians cherish, is not the type of communication that is profitable to a developing nation. The aim of persuasion is to change people's views, positions and decisions on issues or products and get them to take certain actions. It does not always permit the receiver of the message to reflect on it properly, consider independent and beneficial action after receiving it. To forestall this, the message is repeated often until the receiver's consciousness is saturated with it. The receiver at this point has no option than, at least, to want to try it or accept it. There are those who have argued that advertisement is not communication but information that intends to persuade its consumers, sometimes to deceive them, to take actions they ordinarily would not have taken (Moemeka, 2012 p. 99).

Why Nigerian Politicians Lack Credibility

Nigerian politicians do not appear to have credibility because they prefer to engage in persuasion, coercion, misinformation and, sometimes, disinformation, to the contest that takes place in the marketplace of ideas. They are probably not able to engage the citizenry in communication because of their hidden agenda. Often times, as the people have discovered, what most politicians do once they get into office is at variance with what they promised they would do during electioneering. Many are rather more interested in lining their pockets than pursuing what the people need. They cannot successfully serve their people unless and until they know what the people really need and not what they think the people need. To know what the people need, Nigerian politicians must make conscious efforts to find out from them, not by second-guessing them or imagining what their needs should be. It has been insinuated that the reason politicians do not communicate with the people is that their intentions are always not clean because they are corruption prone.

Likely effects of lack of proper information

Two possible consequences of information, particularly diluted information, exist: First, it could lead to confusion; and second, to counter-information. To clear the confusion could result in reinforcement of existing attitude and behaviour. For instance, someone who has a doubt about a politician's intention may never be persuaded to believe him, even when he is telling the truth.

How many of our politicians go to their constituency offices regularly to be consulted or informed of the activities going on in their constituencies or on the needs of their people? How many of them have formed the habit of reporting their activities regularly to their electors?

The Role of the Media

If Nigerians are to derive the real dividends of democracy from the system and from their elected and appointed representatives, then, a beneficial relationship must exist between them and the media of communication in the country. The zero-sum nature of information or persuasion, at least in the context of political communication in Nigeria⁵, puts the public at a great disadvantage.

Although the ownership structure of media establishments in Nigeria is no longer a monopoly, political and economic situations prevailing still constrain the advantages that liberalisation ought to confer on the consuming public. Because most media organs in Nigeria are not economically viable⁶, they are subject to the whims and caprices of the political authorities in their areas of influence. For instance, the fact that several media houses cannot survive economically without the patronage of the governments, either through advertising, funding of special projects or outright handouts, operators of these media organisation find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to operate professionally.

That many editors and reporters find it difficult to hide their friendship with those in government or industry makes it impossible for them to absolve themselves from the charge of partisanship. This is evident in the unprofessional conduct of suppressing stories that are adverse to their friends or benefactors, or giving undue attention to those that are not favourable to the adversaries of their cohorts.

A proprietor of a newspaper in Nigeria was once quoted as having advised his reporters to use their identity cards as their “meal tickets.” In a situation like that, what could one expect other than falsehood, blackmail and extortion?

Many, if not all news organisations in Nigeria, have commercialised the news items they carry in their media as a matter of official policy (McQuail, 1987, pp. 3-4; Adaja, 2011, pp. 71 – 81; Oso, 2011, pp. 83 –

⁵ *The disseminator of the information or persuasive message wants all the benefits for himself, if possible.*

⁶ *Harsh economics of production, poor purchasing power and competition from the social media and the Internet have combined to render the traditional media prostrate.*

104). But news is supposed to be provided for the public free of charge as part of the surveillance function of the mass media (Lasswell, 1948; Wright, 1975; Sobowale, 1983). I recently queried the management of one of our major national newspapers on why the paper had to carry full page advertisement on its front page? I was told that the management did not initially want to do it but had been forced by the attendant economic advantage. News items that are not sponsored do not often get prominence or coverage by some newspapers. If they are covered by their reporters at all, they hardly see the light of day. It is even worse for the electronic media. The bargain is concluded before the news crew ever steps out. Real news items that get broadcast by our television stations without payment, for instance, have other collateral benefits. They are either government or advertiser sponsored. Even when such stories are published, they fall short of expectations. They are usually reported in favour of their sources and not with the kind of analyses that can help the reading, listening or viewing public to take decisions that may likely counter the expectations of their sponsors. Such stories are always devoid of the kind of analyses and interpretations that will expose the hidden elements in them. In other words, news managers exercise their gate-keeping functions in favour of their news sources to the detriment of their consuming publics. This is something the members of the public do not always see or realise.

Politicians are always in pursuit of attention and listening ears; they are, therefore, often more comfortable with journalists whose conscience they can buy, so long as they will give the necessary exposure. It will not matter if this romance lasts only as long as the journalist is needed or considered useful.

It will be unfair to expect the reporter or his editor to divorce himself/herself totally from the events in his/her environment (Ajayi and Ogoma, 2012). After all, he/she is not just a member of that environment but a product of it; his/her views of reality and the world

⁷They are either from prominent members of the society, powerful friends of top management or senior staff. This is why undue footage is devoted to organisational stories that have little value to the public.

he/she lives in have been shaped by the environment. It is also unrealistic to think that the forces in the environment would not exert pressure upon him/her. How he/she harmonises the pressure from the politicians, his/her own biases and the interests of the public, is what Jose has succinctly described in his book, *Walking a Tight Rope* (Jose, 1987) as the act of “delicate balancing.”

What we are asking the journalist -- the observer-general of events/activities around the world and the shaper and definer of reality -- to do is to try, always, to be “objective”⁸ in his/her portrayal of events; to reflect all aspects of the event and the possible ramifications of it, as fairly as possible, realizing that his/her readers, listeners and viewers, too, have their own social, psychological, economic and political factors that determine what they hear, see and understand and how they react. De Fleur and Ball-Rokeach (1976) put it aptly when they say that news media share similar fate with the three constitutional branches being partially independent from and partially dependent on one another to accomplish their own tasks. Whatever the case may be, the reporter is in a no-win-situation. His/her source wants to use him/her just as he/she wants to use his/her source. Who gets the better part of the other depends on how desperate or smart any of them is. However, the reporter should be smarter and determine how much of him/her would be permitted to be used by the source for his/her advantage.

The Input from Schools and Departments of Journalism and Mass Communication

The comments on the position of our democracy vis-à-vis our politicians and the structure of communication in Nigeria cannot be complete without a word or two about the preparations mass

⁸I always have difficulty with this word because I do not believe that it exists in reality. What a journaliss can aspire to is fairness.

communicators receive in this country. The vital role journalists and other communicators play in social interactions and national development is not small (Pye, 1963; Schramm, 1964). The arrival of the new media and citizens journalism into the arena of mass dissemination of messages has even made that role not only diverse, but also much more complex, intricate and demanding. It, thus, has imposed greater responsibility on those who define the realm, the structure and the texture of reality for citizens, not only to become more competent but also to be more responsive to the diverse needs of their patrons.

It is impossible for a man to give what he does not have. This is what imposes enormous responsibility on teachers in our schools of journalism and mass communication to ensure that the students we train in the profession of journalism and mass communication, including public relations and advertising, have sufficient knowledge and skills to discharge their functions professionally and beneficially. Their training must equip them to help the public make sense out of the information chaos into which the modern society has thrown all of us.

Teachers in these important institutions must constantly review their syllabuses to ensure that the contents of their programmes enhance their students' ability and capability to practise their vocation without needing to be retrained. Unless they understand not only the intricacies of their profession but also the complexities of the public they are called upon to serve, they will never be useful. Journalists are not immune from politics because they are political (Ajayi & Ogoma, 2012, p. 19), maybe not openly partisan. While some may be able to suppress their personal political views, others are less able to do so because of the factors of the economy that we alluded to earlier on. Also, key to the dispassionate and responsible performance of journalistic duties in the new Nigeria of our dream is their ability to analyse, synthesise and understand issues and events thoroughly before disseminating them to their audiences.

It is essential to appreciate that the model of news presentation that was for many decades regarded as sacrosanct is no longer suitable for the complex and interlocked relationships of modern times. That model requires the reporter to say only what somebody else has said or observed, without offering an explanation or putting any meaning to it. The dynamics of today's life dictate otherwise. In those days, anyone wishing to comment on the story would have to do so under another job category⁹. For instance, few people buy or read newspapers these days. Those who listen to radio or watch television are seeking gratifications other than news or current affairs that basically inform and educate. As noted earlier, information and communication technology infrastructure has further compounded the problems occasioned by poor finances and hustling. Even students, in general, but in particular, those in journalism and mass communication programmes, do not consume media fares. When they listen to radio or watch television they do so for music or soaps. We require empirical studies to show if the modern Internet-based media's audiences behave better.

Conclusion

In summary, the job of taking Nigeria to the next level on the journey to true democracy is arduous but attainable. It is a job every Nigerian must be committed to. It only requires commitment, patriotism, sacrifice and discipline. It starts with seeing the reality in the words of Solomon that “vanity of vanities; all is vanity (Ecclesiastes 1 v 2 KJV). Nothing but service and promotion of the joy of others in this world is worth pursuing. Every other thing is ephemeral, perishable and a vanity.

Whatever gift God has given to man should be used to advance the happiness of mankind. That is the only value worth pursuing.

It is interesting that man cannot see God but, for those who seek Him, God communicates effectively with humans (Colossians 1 v 17;

He/she would either have to write a letter to the editor, an opinion, commentary or an editorial.

Hebrews 1 v 13). It was communication that was the foundation of the world, it is communication that has sustained it and it is communication that will ensure its continuity (Pye, 1963, p. 3). When man begins to live on other planets, he will have to learn how to communicate with the inhabitants of those planets, in order to live happily with them.

Communication, not mere information or persuasion, will guarantee man his space and help him to achieve his potentials in this highly competitive world of ours.

In order not only to manage the mandate entrusted to them well, but also to convince the electorate that they are doing so, Nigerian politicians need to engage those they claim to be representing in active communication. The critical stakeholders, journalists and other communicators, political and appointive office holders, and the citizens themselves, should play their roles well to ensure that Nigeria transits to the next level of democratic growth and development. Those in the position to assist the citizens to derive maximum advantage from God's blessings upon this land - the media and political officers - must encourage the citizens to ask questions and demand their rights always.

It is clear from the analyses above that re-dedication and re-commitment to the cause of Nigeria is needed, if we must carry on as one united, prosperous, fair, just, egalitarian and secure society.

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