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Communication strategies for agricultural development

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Abstract

In the age of economy meltdown with suggestion of agriculture for economic recovery, this paper examines the significance of agriculture for development and economic growth in the world. While examining these suggestions as previously stated by scholars, the paper further investigates the problems and challenges of the different sectors that enhance development. However, more emphasis is focused on the development of the agricultural sector, which seems to be lagging behind. Researchers suggest diverse ways in which communication strategies can be employed for developing the agricultural sector in Nigeria. While emphasising the need for young people to change their stereotype view of agriculture, mostly obtained from ICT exposure, the study recommends that the government make policies on land that is favourable to agriculture or for cultivation of crops in the country.

Keywords: Development, agriculture, identity, technology, ICT, and identity.

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1. Introduction

Back in the past, identity did not seem to be a difficult concept to define because people were identified as members of a community based on birth. Identity is a form of representation that societies and countries have battled with and are still battling with in this present age. This is mainly because of the presence of globalisation, which has encouraged intercultural communication. Identity is regulated by culture.

Feason (1999) argues that

'identity' is presently used in two linked senses, which may be termed 'social' and 'personal'. In the former sense, an 'identity' refers simply to a social category, a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes. In the second sense of personal identity, an identity is some distinguishing characteristic (or characteristics) that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable. He then concludes that, 'identity in its present incarnation has a double sense. It refers at the same time to social categories and to the sources of an individual's self-respect or dignity.

In relation to the question of identity, especially with the present awareness of the concept of globalisation which runs across the borders of the world, Zaharna (1989) is forced to ask these pertinent questions about the representation and societal manifestation of identity. 'How do our relationship with different other affect our ability to maintain self-identity?' Explaining further Baumeister (n.d.), believes that 'identity may contain material that is not part of the self-concept because identity is not fully contained in the person's own mind'.

The significance of identity brings a form of representation and relevance to a society. This is a form of relevance that will stay for decades. However, his identity has been threatened especially by the overwhelming presence and manifestation of western ideology. These ideologies seem to spread and dictate how the world operates. Although there is proof that countries such as China, Asia and Brazil are growing while the U.S and the west are on the decline Cox (2011). However, Africa is still behind in standing by our identity and defining who we are for the rest of the world to see. Cruz-Saco (2008) believes that the basis of development is created by economic, social, political and cultural capabilities, hence, cultural identification is significant.

This has obviously affected our development process and execution. This is because the Africans adopt consciously or unconsciously the ideas of the western world without looking within to determine the phenomena that will work for our kind of environment and culture. One of the major cultural heritages that can be identified as a Nigerian culture is farming, which is identified with the agricultural sector.

According to Ogen (2007), 'A strong and an efficient agricultural sector would enable a country to feed its growing population, generate employment, earn foreign exchange and provide raw materials for industries. The agricultural sector has a multiplier effect on any nation's socio-economic and industrial fabric because of the multifunctional nature of agriculture'.

The agricultural sector, especially in Nigeria, has always been an area of focus and an aspect that every Nigerian wants to relate to. Agriculture in Nigeria is not just for the purpose of promoting or solving the food shortage in Nigeria and in other countries at large. Agricultural activities are also seen as a form of cultural identity when it comes to African society. Although governments have made several policies to help build the agricultural sector, their efforts have not succeeded in mobilising Nigerians. It is therefore necessary for the government to come up with communication strategies that could build this sector for development. This study while analysing the place of globalisation in the development defects of the Nigerian agricultural sector, suggests necessary strategies government can use to enhance agricultural activities for development in Nigeria.

2. The Concept of Development

Development is a word commonly used by many, especially in relation to nation building and societal well-being. Sulemana (2010) notes that ‘Since the world war, development has been synonymous with economic, social, and political change in the countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and the South Pacific which have been variously labelled as underdeveloped, less-developed, developing, the Third World and the South’. It has been difficult to give an acceptable definition for this concept, ‘in a precise manner has been a major theoretical and practical challenge’ Ana (2008). Development was said to be marked by ‘pure economic growth which could be precisely measured with quantitative economic indices, and mass production, high technology, and infrastructural growth’ (Ake, 1982). Development was about ‘becoming like Europe and America. Culture and tradition were seen as antithetical to the development process’ (Ojebode, 2008).

According to Szirmai (2015), ‘Some people choose a technocratic interpretation, which focus on policies, instruments and projects, others choose a more radical--political interpretation’. However, while explaining the diverse concept of development by diverse disciplines, Moemeka (1990) explains that

most communication specialists and development agents tend to see development as the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, increased self-confidence, control over one’s self and one’s environment, greater equality, freedom, ability to understand one’s potentials and limitations and willingness to work hard enough to improve on existing conditions’. He then concludes on a general note to explain the major meaning of development to be ‘a change for the better, in both the human, socio-economic and political conditions of the individual, and consequently of the society.

Ikejiaku (2009) stresses that the concept of development, especially in Africa, has been defined based on the chase towards the west. With this mentality, Nigeria and the African continent have neglected the basic elements of development in terms of implementation in the society. That is to say, the main function of development which is to create a better life for the people has been neglected for the visual western concept of development. The criteria used by the United Nation (Lawal, 2006), to identify less developed countries include ‘low income based on a three-year average estimate of the gross national income per capita (under \$750 for inclusion, above \$900 for graduation); human resource weakness, involving a composite human assets index; and economic vulnerability, involving a composite economic vulnerability index’.

On the other hand, Ake (1982) also stresses that the problem of development has been enhanced by globalisation. Globalisation has promoted imbalance across boards as a result of technological advancement of the western countries over the other. This imbalance he believes has affected development in African countries. Lawal (2006) affirms that ‘globalisation has opened up new and extensive opportunities for worldwide development. However, this is not ‘progressing evenly’ as some counties are becoming integrated into the global economy more rapidly than others with the evidence of fast growth and reduced poverty’.

3. Globalisation

The concept of globalisation and development seem to be interconnected because it ‘illustrates the way in which contemporary globalisation connects communities in one region of the world to development in another continent’ (Lawal, 2006). Although globalisation is said to enhance development, the process entails a lot of risk as a result of imbalance which exist in trade flow and imbalance and unstable flow of information across international borders. Globalisation is not just economic but also political, culture and technological in nature. Globalisation has been defined with ‘some connotation referring to progress, development and stability, integration and cooperation, and others referring to regression, colonialism, and destabilisation’ (Al-Rodhan, 2006).

While arguing further on the diverse interpretation of the concept globalisation, Al-Rodhan (2006) notes that ‘no matter what definition you adhere to, globalisation is complex and multifaceted. Therefore, any definition that comes close to reflecting the reality of globalisation must also be complex and multifaceted’. The concept of globalisation seems to be more difficult to define compared to the concept of development. This difficulty rests in the fact that globalisation is defined or seen by different countries and continent in respect to how the idea of globalisation has benefited their countries or nation with regard to development and exchange of goods, ideas, media content, cultures, languages and, most of all, the level of partnership that exists in international relationships. Gordon (2001) affirms this when he explains that ‘the choice of western/modernisation leads to a view that globalisation sees the economically and politically powerful west globalising the rest of the world, whilst universalisation leads to a more neutral stance, taking it’s root from the dictionary definition of the word ‘gloalise’, meaning to universalise’.

Nwokah and Adiele (2014), however argue that ‘The globalization of the world economic system has, however, forced many developing countries such as Nigeria to initiate policy measures and establish institutional frameworks aimed at accelerating their growth and development in line with current global economic trend’. With the controversy that exists in analysing the meaning and impact of globalisation on different countries, many have come to view globalisation as colonialism, a threat to culture and a system of imposture that is believed to affect to a great extent the identity of the developing nations that are still trying to identify and promote their national identity across the world.

Comparing the level of export and import of media contents across boards, Hosseini (2010) notes that Europe distributes more than 80% of its media content across borders compared to North America, East Asia, Latin American and the Caribbean, Central and south Asia, Pacific, sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab states. This for instance explains, ‘the focus on the threat posed to local cultural products and practices by globalised consumer goods and services — on how television and video productions are tending to eclipse traditional forms of entertainment, how pop and rock music are drowning out indigenous music, or how convenience food is blunting the appetite for local cuisine’ (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2009).

According to Eijaz (2011), technology facilitated the processes of connectedness on a larger scale. This phenomenon of increased interconnectedness of economies, polities, societies and cultures is perceived as globalisation. The media served as a tool to accelerate these processes and rubbed the boundaries. Also, most scholars have complained that the gap between developing and developed countries might be difficult to bridge because some have the enabling environment to deliver their quota on an international platform, while the other party is at disadvantages in achieving the same aim on an international level. This conclusion is based on the fact that the developing and developed countries cannot work or perform at the same level on the same playing ground (Tudorescu, Zaharia & Zaharia, 2009). For example, the level of security in less-developing countries compared to OECD countries.

Also is the concept of change in all of this globalisation. Rasul (2010) explains globalisation considering the unavoidable element of change which exists in the world.

Change being the essence of life has been taking place throughout the history of human social existence. The notion of change becomes even more striking and significant in the present day context of globalisation. The linguistic, religious, political and cultural boundaries have blurred so much that the inter-impact of societies has emerged as one of the significant realities of social life. The relationships of nations/states are being reshaped and restructured. The traditional ties based on dualities such as superiority and inferiority, power and powerlessness are being replaced with mutual acceptance and harmony.

The participatory form of development becomes important to ensure mutual understanding and harmony amongst nations. There is need for a more organised method of this distribution that will

ensure fairness, provide equal opportunities across borders to ensure identified identity and development on every side.

4. Development in Nigeria

Development in Nigeria has been through a lot of phases that seem not to move towards an end. This delay and struggle for development in developing countries, Nigeria which happens to be one, is getting more difficult as a result of many challenges encompassed in the country itself. Some of these problems according to Oyibe and Eluu (2015) include 'Indication of poverty' and 'high rate of unemployment'. According to these authors 'the economic conditions of most families in Nigeria have declined to alarming rates'.

While stating that 'Despite these efforts and programmes initiated by federal government of Nigeria in order to eradicate poverty or in other words reduce it a bearable rate, the percentage of poor Nigerians that is those living below the equivalent of one USA dollar still stands at about 70% of the total population of Nigeria Oyibe and Eluu (2015) also concludes that the 'inability of government to actualise set down programmes for developmental purposes in Nigeria is as a result of poor information and communication on business transaction skills between the organisers and the participants'. Nwammuo and Asemah (2013) also affirm that 'The history of economic stagnation, declining welfare and social instability has undermined development for most of the past years of the Nigerian's existence'. Szirmai (2015) stress that 'Some of the major mistakes in development policies are a direct consequence of erroneous advice from development advisers and experts, especially is the neglect of the agricultural sector in the drive for industrialisation at all costs in the 1950s'. Hecht (2010), points out that 'A generation ago, the African nation of Nigeria launched a plan to embrace modern farming. But today the country is more dependent than ever on imported food'.

But agricultural activities kept decreasing while politicians focus on the oil company. However, there is proof that the Nigerian government is beginning to make efforts at improving the agricultural sector which people have lost interest in as a result of globalisation, not just in government but also as a result of the technology that has brought about changes in the way the world interact. According to Ugwe and Kanu (2012) programmes set up by government include the following:

include the farm settlement scheme, National Accelerated Food Production, Agricultural Development Projects, River Basin Development Authorities, National Seed Service, National Centre For Agricultural Mechanisation, Agricultural and Rural Management Training Institute and Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme Fund. Others were the Nigerian Agricultural Cooperative and Rural Development Bank/agricultural bank, Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution Programme, Directorate of Foods, Roads And Rural Infrastructure, Nigerian agricultural insurance company, National Agricultural Land Development Authority, Specialised Universities for Agriculture, Root and Tuber Expansion Programme, rural banking scheme, and National Economic Empowerment And Development Strategy.

Enete and Amusa (2010) argue that 'Both government and the private sector, which should drive the sector through consistent policies, robust funding and infrastructure development, have failed to accord this problem the priority it deserves'.

'Nigeria no doubt, is blessed with enormous material and human resources, but one wonders what the problem is. Why are Nigerian politicians not implementing policies that will boost the economy? And why are Nigerian political communicators not communicating well?' (Nwammuo & Asemah, 2013).

5. Theoretical Framework

Social constructionism: Social constructs of reality according to (Baran & Davis, 2009, I when 'social institutions wield enormous power over culture because we as individuals view the culture they

propagate as having a reality beyond our control'. The construct based on agricultural sector has been effective as a result of globalisation which encouraged the use of ICT. The construct this exposure has created is stereotype by young people about agriculture as a sector or a profession. The stereotype is not just inherent in young Nigerian, but also the government. This is because they make presumed development policies that do not address developmental issue because their ideology of development is based on a social construction of development by the west.

Media development theory: The media development theory is 'concerned with what the media ought to be doing in society rather than what they actually do. In general, the dominant ideas about the obligations of mass media will be consistent with other values and arrangements in a given society' (Raza, 2012). The Nigerian mass media these days have been commercialised; this has therefore drawn their attention from engaging in satisfying societal values to aid development. One of these is promoting the agricultural sector for the purpose of creating awareness and information to enhance development.

6. Communication Strategy for Agricultural Development in Nigeria

Information and communication technology has been widely used in societies for diverse purposes. Nwankwo (2012) affirms that 'Information and Communication Technology is a concept that has become globally appreciated'.

1. Explaining the importance and the use of ICT for the purpose of communication, he suggest that ICT platforms such as internet, television, radio, DVD etc. can be used to provide information to farmers on how to maintain their crops. This he believes has made significant development in agriculture in Nigeria.
2. According to Chukwu (2015), 'Reporting on agriculture is largely restricted to natural disasters, food shortages and rising food prices'. Government need to make conscious effort to use the mass media for the purpose of disseminating information on agriculture and it's significant in the society. These campaigns can be in form of adverts.
3. According to an empirical study carried out by Kayode-Adedeji and Agwu (2015), a few students in their final year were interviewed to understand their view on taking agriculture as a profession, it was discovered that about 90% of the respondent are not ready to venture into agriculture, because they believe it's a dirty profession. On the other hand the research also recommended that agriculture be included in student's curriculum to further create the interest in young people to change their perception about the profession. It was also discovered through the interview that the movie industry has affected young people and created such stereotype in them about agriculture.
4. The government need to make policies on land that is favourable to agriculture or cultivation of crops in the country.
5. Most of the problems encountered by rural farmers remain accessibility to gadgets that are able to provide information about the importance and relevance of agriculture in the Nigerian society.
6. Edutainment is a major tool used by non-governmental organisation. This method of communication development has been successful in effecting change in some areas. This communication strategy can also be employed by government officials to change people's perception and stereotype about agriculture.

7. Recommendations and Conclusion

It is importance to change the stereotype that exists presently, especially among the young people, about agriculture in Nigeria. This stereotype has been affected mainly because ICT has been encouraged as a result of globalisation. This has affected our concept of development as a nation and therefore affecting the decisions we make in relation to development. Access to this type of information should therefore be regulated by government and replaced with information for our cultural development and appreciation of the agricultural sector.

Second, the commodification of the media system in Nigeria is affecting the selection of relevant information that will enhance development. NBC should be run by professionals and not by the government. This is to ensure proper implementation and focus on development issues.

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