

The Mass Media and the Nigerian Society
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Abstract

This paper discusses the place of mass media constitutional obligations of promoting and protecting the country's national interest for meaning development. It recommends that the Federal Government should allocate more funds in her budgets for information and information technology and also open up government business to public scrutiny, required in democratic settings for advancement of anti-corruption crusade of the Federal Government and sustainable development. The Government should also develop and implement to the letter a modern ICT policy that will usher into the economy creation of wealth, job creation, and modern ICT driven education and economy.

Introduction

In developing countries, the issue of development has often been conceptualized and mystified in terms of economics, politics, technology or ideology, based on the legacies inherited from modern nation-states of Western Europe, without recognizing the critical role of information in development. For instance, modern political system has been perceived to have unique characteristics for procedures for making decisions that are rational for development in a democracy. In the same vein, economic factors in development have been seen to have been responsible for the allocation of scarce resources and subsequent increase in national income and welfare of citizens. However, in the twenty first century, information and information technology have been identified as key factors for good governance, and development in a democracy. Therefore information management is critical for developing nations that are in hurry to develop.

In Nigeria, like other African countries, Mazrui (1980) observed that "the condition of underdevelopment has been manifested in the increasing inability of African countries to provide the basic essentials of life to their citizens. The problem of hunger, unemployment, disease, illiteracy, and lack of information of the nation and the world around them, anxiety and insecurity have tended to overwhelm majority of our people, resulting in mass frustration, alienation and disorientation of the citizenry. The situation is compounded by the problems of repression and exploitation perpetrated by a decadent ruling class."

The Mass Media in Digital Age

The basic function of information is to inform, educate and entertain. The rights and obligation of the media are stated in the 1999 constitution of Nigeria (Chapter 11, subsection 22) as follows, "The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass

media shall be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained this chapter (of the constitution) and uphold the responsibilities and accountability of the Government of the people." The objectives stated in this chapter, among others, are for the media's "promotion and protection of national interest, culture and others". However, in most African countries, most often than not, majority of the mass media (apart from government-owned media) distant themselves from national interest and blatantly criticize democratic and liberal governments of the day, knowingly or unknowingly, without recourse to their constitutional obligations and the development of the country.

With the advent of the new digital age "with models of information and computer technology, business and government activities are witnessing a radical transformation in the art of management of information. The 21st century managers and policy makers have to adopt themselves to managing their information via the "web." (Byrne J.A., 2000). Therefore, Nigeria, like other African countries, should effectively use their information resources endowment capacity to encourage government to deal with the urgent task of economic development of society. Britain and United States have been able to effectively project and market their nations development through British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C.) and Cable Network News (C.N.N.). It is however gratifying to note that Nigeria telecommunication, which is private-sector driven, has made appreciable progress in the area of "G.S.M." usage. Nigeria is now acknowledged as having the fastest growing telephone subscription base in the world. From a meagre 400,000 base in year 2000, it has increased to 42 million with a teledensity of about 30 per cent Nigeria has today become the toast of the world in telecommunications, as multinationals fall over one

another to have a bite of the industry". (The News Magazine, 18 February, 2008).

The relationship of information technology and development is very glaring from the analysis of Kazaure (2006). He asserted that "since the 90's it has come to be realized that ICT is not a luxury but a prerequisite for development of the developing countries". This he supported by stating that;

- (i) Everyday, ICT is becoming an increasingly important component of what we do in work place.
- (ii) It also opens new doors for education as millions are learning via self-based, interactive, computer -based courses. The computer is proving an effective teaching tool,..... many colleges now offer programmes whereby the student never sets foot on the physical college campus.

Kazaure (2006) concluded that "developing countries must adopt the ICT in order to become technologically relevant in the New World".

Information Management and Public Policy

Information and public policy are critical factors in the development of a country. Imhanlahimi et al (2004), in examining the interface between information and the public process, and the effect on public policy analysis, has found that there is a crucial interrelationship among them in order to promote sustainable development. They found that "the interrelationship is however seriously interfered with or obstructed by a variety of dominant constraints." The constraints include inadequate human capital, financial resources, large-scale secrecy in government business, inadequate incentives to statisticians and media men and grand corruption in many, if not all, public organizations in Nigeria. All these promote negative effects, including unreliable data and information and inadequate public policy.

The industrial nations of the World are already reaping the benefits of the ICT revolution. Also, some developing ones in Asia are making remarkable progress that has stunned the world, while Nigeria's beautiful ICT policy is still only on paper and has not achieve its stated objectives. The launching of our satellite though laudable has not made any appreciable impact to national development. The Nigerian National Poly on Information Technology (2001) in its vision statement states that it is: "To make Nigeria an IT capable country in Africa and a key player in the information society by the year

2005. using IT as the engine for sustainable development and global competitiveness. The mission is to use IT for education, creation of wealth, eradication of poverty, job creation and global competitiveness.....It is specifically aimed at empowering Nigerians to participate in software and IT developmentencourage local production and manufacture of IT components ..empowering the Youths with IT skills and prepare them for local global competitiveness". These vision statements have not been fully achieved when compared to other Asian countries. India has used its Karnata millennium policy to reduce employment. The IT services in India generates \$10 billion in exports comparable to some extent to Nigeria's crude oil proceeds in 2003. (Readers Digest, 2003 page 153-156). Philippines, China, Mexico are also reaping comparable benefits. It is therefore obvious that the Federal Government of Nigeria has to revive and implement her I&CT policy if she is to experience development in the new digital age.

Thus the media houses need to imbibe the orientation that they should be guided by integrity and zeal to package and provide information to the various publics, they should be patriotic and also give constructive criticism. They should act as agents of development, good governance and peace. They are to boost the image of the country and our leaders, especially the political leaders within and outside the country. The part of the government, the political leaders and bureaucrats need to change from bureaucratic red-tapism and adhering strictly to secrecy in government business.

The Freedom of Information Bill, which was originally passed by the National Assembly in February, 2007 after the harmonization by both houses, was turned down by the then President Obasanjo. The bill has now resurfaced in the National Assembly in 2008. The bill when it becomes law, will give Nigerian citizens access to public records and documents, subject to certain exemptions, such as, information injurious to national security, law enforcement investigations, penal institutions, trade secrets, among others, as specified in the bill. Morgan, M. (2006) in making a case for the Freedom of Information Bill in Ghana pointed out that "corruption flourishes in darkness and so any progress towards opening government organization to public scrutiny is likely to advance anti-corruption effects." Ene (2007). Ene further pointed out that "if the bill were passed into law, the National Assembly would have left a major legacy for Nigerians as it would put Nigeria in the league of some 70 countries around the world that have freedom of Information

Laws. It will make Nigeria the fourth country in Africa to adopt such a law, after South Africa in 2000." Despite the benefits of this bill, it is still not passed into law. It was assumed that the dilly dally involved in the passage of this law is traced to the civil service old orientation of "keep our secret," which is supported by the oath of secrecy taken when employed into Civil Service. The oath of secrecy should be expunged from the employment oath in the Civil Service. Also, there is the fear that the media practitioners or/and other opposition parties may capitalize on some unanalyzed raw data which may appear immaterial but could be used to castigate the government of the day. There was also the fear that the requirement for judicial review of any refusal to grant access to public records will give much power to judiciary to review Executive actions and decisions.

It is however hoped that the orientations of both the Executive and the Media practitioners will change in the new dispensation under the New President, of Federal Republic of Nigeria, and the new National Assembly so that citizens can enjoy the dividends of democracy through free flow of information for national development in a democratic government.

Information Management in Nigeria

The importance of information management in business cannot be overemphasized. Information and reliable data form the bedrock of business management decisions. Agbonifoh, et al (1998), stressed the importance of information management by pointing out that "problems can only be anticipated, identified, if accurate, reliable and relevant information can be obtained promptly from both internal and external sources." Marion (1961) equally stressed the importance of information management by stating that "to manage a business well is to manage its future, and to manage the future is to manage information."

These analyses for business equally apply to government. Imhanilahimi, et al (2004) asserted that "only the human element is more critical in the management of a successful organization, be it public or private." In the Obasanjo regime, what resembles some information management was when emphasis shifted to applying business orientation for managing some socio-economic sectors of the state, especially, as espoused by the erstwhile Minister of Information, Oby Ozekwesili. The Minister effectively utilized the services of private consultancy and the mass media to have reasonable quantum of information for planning and managing the educational sector with an acronym of **"TOGETHER WE CAN."** This temporary

paradym shift shows that the media has to go beyond their traditional role, as the conscience of the nation and the watch dog of the society to exploring information strategies that will develop the nation. This could be done through motivating the government in some areas of high achievement and spurring up the same government to emulate some progressive developing countries, especially China and other Asia countries that have shocked the world with their remarkable growth and development indices since the twentieth century.

In the midst of abject poverty and share underdevelopment in Nigeria, the critical questions to ask on information for development are:

- i. What are we informing and educating for?
- ii. Whom are we conscientizing and watching for?

From the stand point of the stage of our development, the media in Nigeria, like other African countries, are expected to mobilize their resources towards achieving social and economic development for our impoverished nation. The editorial of a development magazine (Development Monitor) aptly and creditably stated that:

"The Media is supposed to go down to the basics and inform the people about the main issues, and the people, their resources, the government and how the peoples resources are being managed to provide employment, affordable health care, good and quantitative education, development of infrastructure, etc and making life better for the people. The Media should inform the people on the programmes and policies of Government as well as educate and enlighten them on how the government is expending their (the people) resources to meet their (people) expectations."

According to Kotler, "in the new millennium age information is changing at an accelerating rate. Given the following changes, the need for real-time information is greater than at any time in the past." Moreover, the advent of the new information technologies has changed the information environment and subsequently the management of information. The advent of the new information technologies, computers, microfilm, modern cameras, cable television, copy machines, fax machines, video recorders, video disc CD-ROM drives and the

Internet have made impressive mark on information technology. In view of these developments, media houses are to change their reporting systems and equipment to suit the new digital age for efficiency and effectiveness.

In Nigeria, many media houses such as NTA with their network broadcast system adapted their systems to the delight of all Nigerians, while others are lagging behind. Channel Television for instance has created a niche for itself for efficient and current news broadcasting systems in the country. "The Guardian" newspaper is equally well appreciated by the reading public for its objectivity and neutrality in reporting.

Concluding Remarks

It is hoped that Nigerian media houses will embrace the use of the new information technologies to improve their performance to support the Federal and State Government to develop politically and economically. The shift to this new paradigm requires imbibing change as follows:

- i. The media should change and focus more on information and enlightenment of the people on the programmes and policies of Government at all levels.
- ii. Inform on how the people's resources are managed to enable the citizens contribute by ways of advice, writing, discussing and seminars and workshops.
- iii. Inform the people of our state of underdevelopment in the comity of nations and their possible roles.
- iv. Inform the people on good governance on peace and security.
- v. To monitor and offer constructive criticisms on budgets, expenditure, due process and rule of law, among others.
- vi. To adapt to the new information technology for efficiency in order to be able to effectively support the government to develop and meet up the various development targets such as those in the United Nations, Millennium Development Goals and others.

The Federal Government on its part needs to revive or develop a virile and feasible ICT policy that usher in creation of wealth, eradication of poverty, job creation and modern ICT driven education and

economy in Nigeria. The long-delayed Freedom of Information should be passed into law as opening up government business to public scrutiny may likely advance the current anti-corruption efforts of the Federal Government.

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