

Book Review

Communication and Rural Development in Nigeria

Edited by Lai Oso and Lanre Adebayo

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Reviewer: Francis P. Kasoma

Anybody editing a reader such as this one should be prepared to accommodate differences, and perhaps, contradictions among the various authors. Herein lies the strength as well as the weakness of any book of readings. The strength, because by expressing differences authors enrich the reader with various ways of looking at the same issue. The weakness, because the thread that should entwine a book of readings is often weakened in the differences, especially if they are many and substantial.

The reader of *Communication and Rural Development in Nigeria* should, therefore, make allowance for differences in opinions regarding key concepts in development communication in general and the Nigerian rural communication scene in particular. In some chapters, for instance, development is defined in specifically economic terms. In others, it is seen as a whole-embracing phenomenon which touches every facet of human life. Similarly, the definition of communication ranges from the old linear school of transmission of information to the more recent dynamic view of sharing of human experience.

(An example of differences by authors on the local Nigerian scene is: which mass medium is the best for development communication? Some writers have said radio, others television, others newspapers and still others a combination of all, plus the traditional media.

Nearly all the authors, however, have agreed on the following:

1. that Nigeria's mass media do not serve rural areas and there is, therefore, a need to introduce rural media;
2. that development journalism is a critical reportage of the goings-on in a community which acts as a catalyst in improving the life situation of the ordinary people;

3. that there is little or no development communication in Nigeria;
4. that the development communicator would have to identify himself/herself with the rural community he or she is serving;
5. that locally-based, small media rather than urban-based, big media are more useful for development communication; and
6. that the rural people should have an input in the agenda-setting role of the local media.

(Looking at the individual chapters, Chapter 1 on the 'Role of the Nigerian Mass Media in National Rural Development and Transformation' by Olatunji Dare, is clearly a misnomer. The author has not discussed any role of the mass media at all. What he has done is discuss the constraints on Nigerian mass media in rural development. When the writer states in the last but two paragraphs before the conclusion that 'The foregoing does not in any way imply that the Nigerian mass media cannot play any role in the effort to achieve integrated rural development', it is as if he has recognized the chapter's deficiency and is now trying to salvage it. But it is too late.

Chapter 2 on 'The Role of the Mass Media in Rural Development: a Critical Appraisal' by Lai Oso is more pointed. The writer, however, fails to give an idea of how ruralites can set up local radio stations on self-reliance. But he makes the valid point that the total involvement of the rural community is an essential element in the running of countryside communication networks.

(In Chapter 3, 'The Development Journalism Concept and the Nigerian Journalist: An Agenda', Lenre Adebayo argues that although the press exists to reflect the dominant view of the dominant class, when occasion demands it, it does serve the whole society. On this basis, he writes, it can, therefore, be logical to reason that where there is national consensus regarding the issue of development, the press could play the role of a development catalyst. What about where there is no consensus? Even there, the press should have a developmental role. Hence, the importance of localised media to address the local community's rather than the national consensus.

(The author, however, does a good job in his exposition of development journalism as reportage which focuses on progress being made and pointing out the areas of failures, including exposing incidences of corruption. He states that development journalism does not restrict press freedom nor advocate press censorship but rather widens the scope for innovative reporting. This is development journalism *par excellence*, as it should be, not as it is practised in Nigeria or, indeed, in any other African country.

Andrew Moemeka in Chapter 4, 'The Mass Media of Communication and Rural Dwellers: Towards the Effectiveness of Development Messages', makes a welcome distinction between mass media used as vehicles of communication and mass media used as channels of

information. He argues that the distinction is necessary because contrary to popular and sometimes professional opinion, mass media are not by nature channels of mass communication. They are merely channels of mass information, distribution and transmission. It is only when the mass media have been changed from acting as channels for distribution and transmission to asserting themselves as vehicles for participation, expression and discussion, he argues, that they can rightly be called the media of mass communication and can become effective in inducing culture-bound rural inhabitants to change their attitudes to life by accommodating new ideas. This is a thought-provoking statement. So are the statements about the importance of traditional media and traditional approaches to communication the writer expresses!

(In Chapter 5, 'Broadcasting for Rural Development', Babatunde Folarin makes the valid point that the new international information and communication order should begin in Nigeria by reducing the glaring imbalance of the flow of information between the majority rural and minority urban peoples. The writer, however, seems to be leader-centred when he suggested that the main purpose of the local rural radio stations is to be used by leaders to speak to their people since these leaders cannot go round to everybody. But he does a good job, unlike Oso in Chapter 2, of discussing the details of how to set up a village radio station.)

Chapter 6, 'Policy Guidelines for the Democratisation of TV and Video Systems in Nigeria' by Olalekan Ajia, is a general treatise and does not address policy alternatives about Nigeria.

Chapter 7, 'Newspaper Ownership and Agricultural News in Nigeria' by Terry A. Olowu, is a useful study of 17 newspapers whose findings are valid. But the researcher by implication seems to suggest that only the mass media have the potential for mobilizing Nigerians for greater agricultural production. The role of interpersonal communication seems to be ignored.

Chapter 8, 'Political Dynamics of Rural Communication: Perspectives on Nigeria' by Eddy Aina, criticises Nigerian politicians for carrying out *ad-hoc* arrangement and selective attention to the development of rural areas — what Obasanjo once called 'firebrigade approach' to rural transformation.

The author discusses the role of radio and television in rural development. He does not think newspapers can be used for the same purpose, due to the high rate of illiteracy. This reviewer does not agree. The rural newspaper can be even more useful for development communication than television which in most African states, including Nigeria, is an elite rather than a mass medium.

(This chapter seems to contain a factual error. It states that WNTV was the first television station in Africa. It was the first in black or Sub-Saharan Africa. Egypt had the first station on the continent.)

In Chapter 9, 'Communication at the Grassroots: Challenges and

Constraints', Femi Olurin argues that ora-media is the ideal communication at the grassroots. He goes on to explain how some of the ora-media are used in the countryside. Finally, in Chapter 10, 'Toward a Rural Press in Nigeria'! Lai Oso is at his best. His description of the rural press and the way he discusses its catalyst role in enhancing village life is both inspiring and challenging. This reviewer has expressed almost identical views in other works. What is not certain, however, is whether the Nigerian government, and any African government for that matter, can assist in the establishment of the type of rural newspaper that Oso describes.

Journalism/communication scholars, students and practitioners in Africa, and particularly those of Nigeria, are urged to buy a copy of this book and study its contents. While reading it, they should ignore the many typographical errors.