

Population Information Campaign in Swaziland: Balancing Individual Values and National Development Goals

By Eronini R. Megwa

Abstract

This paper examines population information and communication campaigns in Swaziland as an important tool for changing attitudes and reproductive behaviour. In addition, it suggests a synergistic intervention programme that is need-based, culture-sensitive, community-driven and girded by the concept of "Lilima" (neighbours helping neighbours) as a more realistic approach to planning an action programme in population control in Swaziland. This approach is informed by the thinking that for development to be meaningful, less disruptive and sustainable, it has to provide a balance between personal values and national development goals. It is further premised on the assumption that personal action has implications not for the individual actor alone but also for the community in which the individual lives and works.

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La Politique Démographique au Souaziland: L'équilibre Précaire Etre les Valeurs Personnelles et Les Cibles du Développement National

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Résumé

Cet exposé est centré sur l'analyse de la politique démographique, ainsi que sur les campagnes de communication au Souaziland. Celles-ci sont envisagées comme un moyen important en vue de changer les attitudes et le comportement des gens, à l'égard de la reproduction. De plus, cette démarche implique un projet d'une intervention "synergistique", qui soit basée sur les besoins qui tient compte de la culture, auquel participent les membres de la communauté intéressée, et qui soit motivé par le concept de "Lilima" (où les voisins s'entraident). Cette démarche se veut plus réaliste, en ce qui concerne la politique démographique au Souaziland. Cette approche est motivée par la supposition que tout projet de développement qui se veut réaliste, peu perturbateur et pratique, doit commencer par l'établissement d'un équilibre entre les valeurs personnelles, et les objectifs du développement national. De plus, on suppose aussi que les activités des individus ont un rapport très étroit, avec les entreprises communautaires.

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Introduction

Reduction in birth rate is an important and sensitive area of population control. In some African countries, for example, it is taboo to even suggest fertility management because of the importance Africans attach not only to reproductive behaviour but also to economic and social significance of having many children. It is, therefore, necessary that any intervention programme in population management in Africa should be carefully and skillfully designed to emphasize change in individual reproductive behaviour as a necessary condition for achieving national development goals.

Communication campaign directed towards population management as an intervention mechanism involves the use of communication media in creating awareness of the personal and national risks in unplanned individual reproductive behaviour, and in generating positive changes in the orientation and behaviour of people towards population control. It is also used in training people in skills that enable them to adopt responsible reproductive behaviours, and in persuading them to assume responsibility for controlling population rate.

In Swaziland, there is a dearth of public information campaigns undertaken to generate positive changes in the awareness, orientation, and behaviour of Swazis towards population control. This is attributable, in part, to cultural, religious, and social factors that not only combine to shield the personal and national risks of an uncontrolled population growth but also encourage, create and foster attitudes and behaviours deemed to have deleterious effects on population control in Swaziland.

Swazi Social Structure and Communication Systems

Society exerts powerful influence on individual behaviour. This is even more so in Africa where, for many people, the family and social ties remain the major mechanisms through which they derive meaning for their lives. In Swaziland, as in many parts of Africa, interpersonal contact is the predominant mode of communication, mediated by mass communi-

cation for some people, particularly urban dwellers who have access to the mass media. Even then, this media access is limited because of literacy, linguistic and socio-economic problems.

Keys (1980) and Blackburn (1983) in their cross-cultural comparative studies have shown that planned change in population wide behaviour needs to pay close attention to socio-cultural influences and socializing mechanisms that shape behaviours. In designing intervention strategies in the area of population control in Swaziland, therefore, Swazi culture and traditions need to be taken into account. In addition, Swazi traditional institutions-for example, the Royal family-Thinkundla (local administration) and the mass media, which influence behaviour within the Swazi nation, should be taken into account when planning and executing information campaigns to change reproductive behaviours of Swazis.

Our emphasis on a synergistic approach in the design of intervention strategies for population control in Swaziland is predicated upon the assumption that behaviour is formed and shaped by the dominant culture and the individual's social relations in the context of his or her communities. Communities as agents of the dominant culture, and as systems of exchange and influence, establish opportunities for people to act in specific ways. Communities also transmit values and norms that guide or encourage some behavioural choices (Finnegan, Bracht and Viswanath, 1989).

Therefore, an information campaign designed to stimulate reproductive behavioural change in the Swazi population should elicit the support of Swazi communities and traditional institutions to act as change agents to achieve the desired outcomes. The advantage of this approach is that it makes for a more conducive social and physical environment for changing reproductive behaviour. In Swaziland, for example, there is a deep respect for the monarchy and its subsidiary institutions. These institutions, in varying degrees sanction, justify, and license social acts. It is therefore, necessary to enlist their support or approval if an intervention programme in unplanned reproductive behaviour in Swaziland is to be effective, meaningful and sustainable.

So far, Swaziland has been able to maintain a uniquely relatively stable dualistic social system. For instance, the country has remained modern in the western sense while at the same time maintaining many of its ancestral customs and traditions. This blending of the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, has had significant influence on the social lives of Swazi people.

This dualism is also reflected in English and Siswati as the only two languages used by the mass media in Swaziland. For example, there are newspapers published in both languages. There are two daily newspapers, the *Times of Swaziland* and *The Observer* owned by private enterprise and government respectively. The *Times* publishes in both Siswati and English, while *The Observer* publishes in English only. The publishers of the *Times* also publish daily evening as well as weekly newspapers, *The Evening Times* and *The Times: Sunday*. Television and radio are owned by government and operated by two government corporations.

The major indigenous mode of communication is through the Tinkhundla system—a form of local administration in which local laws and customs are used as a basis for governance. In this system, people gather at the palace of their local chiefs (Induvunas) on a regular basis to discuss local disputes and community problems, and to seek solution to them. The size of the audience at this type of group meeting depends on the size of the community. And it is the local chief or the "Induvuna" who presides and leads the discussions. In addition, news and information are transmitted to the people through this channel. Folklore is another form of indigenous communication in Swaziland. The emphasis here is the use of old stories as a vehicle for socialization and development.

It is advisable, therefore, for public information programmes in Swaziland, particularly intervention programmes, to take into account both modern and indigenous forms of communication available in the Swazi society. However, for these forms of communication to play an effective role in disseminating new ideas and concepts such as change in reproductive behaviours, information campaigns should utilize them creatively to reflect contemporary realities. If

existing communication systems in Swaziland are skillfully and creatively utilized, they could serve as a vital tool for changing attitudes and behaviours of Swazis towards fertility control.

A Synergistic Approach: Information, Value and Human Action

Dervin (1989) observed that public information campaigns use models of information which are embedded in the assumption that information is objective and ultimately leads to public good. Closely related to this view, she argues, is the mechanistic concept of communication as transmission. The implication of these views, Dervin argues, is that they see information and communication as neutral and unaffected by human action. In reality, however, information generation and dissemination are human processes and therefore bear the imprints of the actors and producers involved in this process. And as such, information as a product of this process of human action, bears the differences in human experience, the discontinuities inherent in social reality, and the variable ways humans deal with discontinuities (Dervin, 1989).

Given the dualistic nature of Swazi society, the communication systems in it, and the varied social and cultural values that impinge on human communication in Swaziland, it will be reasonable and logical to adopt a view of communication in which information is conceived as a product of active human action. In this context, therefore, communication should be visualized as an interactive enterprise in which both the sender and the receiver of information take active part in its creation, transmission and reception.

Because information bears the imprints of its generators, population information campaigns cannot be value-free. It is for this reason that each phase of an information campaign designed to control population growth should take into consideration conflicting interests in the campaign. Central to this conflict is the tension between individual freedom, needs and cultural values on the one hand, and national economic and political decisions on the other.

It is therefore imperative for population information campaign planners to recognize the sensitive nature of changing reproductive behaviours, the tension between values and national goals, and to enlist the resources and efforts of different interest groups in every phase of the campaign in Swaziland. Several scholars and researchers have noted the challenge faced by those involved in intervention programmes in reproductive behaviours in Africa. Agri (1978) observed that Africans have an insatiable and irrepressible desire for children. According to Nwuneli (1978), the average African perceives small-sized family as facing an economic disadvantage. This perception, Nwuneli argues, is anchored in the belief that children are God-given and cannot be equated with wealth. A successful marriage in Africa is therefore often measured by the number of children a couple has (Nwuneli, 1978). This is underscored by the belief in some parts of Africa that a large number of children helps to preserve a marriage. In other words, a large family in Africa is associated with wealth, honour and prestige. Hence, a child is regarded as a good investment (Pratt, 1986).

A synergistic approach to population information campaign planning in Swaziland should involve (1) an assessment of the needs of the intended recipients of population campaign information by the intended recipients themselves, (2) an assessment of the level of involvement of the intended recipients in reducing birth rates, (3) a substantial and genuine involvement of intended recipients of population information campaign materials in the execution and evaluation of the campaign, (4) design of relevant persuasive messages, and (5) utilization of community efforts and resources, and traditional institutions. In addition, it is absolutely important for population information campaign planners in Swaziland to apply appropriate audience segmentation techniques in assessing the needs of the intended recipients of campaign information materials. This will enable them to ascertain the extent to which the intended recipients are involved in the problem, and to determine the communication needs and behaviours of the intended recipients.

Audience Segmentation

Segmentation is based on the concept of publics as consisting of people with similar levels of problem recognition and problem involvement. It is possible therefore, that we may come up with different types of publics depending on the level of audience involvement in the problem of unplanned and uncontrolled reproductive behaviour or their perception of the dangers in having many children in Swaziland.

Yet there may be other Swazis who may be involved in the problem because of their shared sense of community values, and as a result of where they live or work. Segmentation based on community values is important and relevant because of the communal nature of the Swazi society. In this paper, it is recommended that audience segmentation be based on the following factors: needs of the audience, level of involvement of the audience in the problem, and community values or what we choose to call "Lilima"(pooling resources to solve a national or common problem).

(1) Needs Assessment

Segmentation approach to audience analysis is appropriate in determining the needs of the intended recipients of information about the adverse effects of an unplanned reproductive behaviour. This technique recognizes the sensitive nature of reproductive behaviour change as well as the need to identify particular publics as one way of designing effective campaign messages and reaching the target audience.

It is therefore necessary for population information campaign planners in Swaziland to conduct an audience analysis to identify relevant Swazi publics, their beliefs, and their perceptions of fertility management. It is from this assessment then that a determination of the level of involvement of the target in the problem will be made.

(2) Level of Audience Involvement in the Problem

It is important to determine, through audience segmentation, whether the issue of population control is a low thresh-

old issue for particular Swazi publics. Although it is generally believed in Africa that children are God-given or are good economic investments, there are some people who visualize "many children" as a problem. It is, therefore, important to determine who these publics are and the degree of importance attached to the issue of reproductive behaviour by each individual within a specific Swazi public.

In segmenting the Swazi audience into different publics to determine the level of their involvement in the issue of population control, a problem recognition approach is recommended. This approach is particularly relevant in a campaign that seeks to change people's attitude and behaviour towards reproductive behaviour and one that places emphasis on balancing personal values and national economic goals. The assumption here is that when a situation such as an unplanned individual reproductive behaviour and its adverse effects on available national resources are sketched as problematic and subsequently perceived as such by the target audience, it will be easier to persuade them to change its attitudes in order to correct that problem. This approach also recognizes the need for the audience to be genuinely and substantially involved in the planning and implementation of the campaign.

(3) Audience Involvement in Problem Determination

Involving the audience in the determination of problems is based on the assumption provided by the teleological theory of communication behaviour. Dewey (1910, 1938, 1939) defines teleology as the perception that something is lacking in a situation. Dewey theorized that people think and inquire when they recognize that a situation is problematic and indeterminate. And in a situation such as in Swaziland as is true elsewhere in Africa where reproduction is perceived as a God-given attribute, a prestige, and an honour-conferring act, close audience involvement is required in order to get the audience to see the risks and disadvantages associated with an unplanned and an uncontrolled reproductive behaviour. The task here is to get the audience to perceive the issue of unplanned reproductive behaviour as a problem by giving

them information on the disadvantages of such a behaviour. This would then motivate them to communicate about it and perhaps, respond positively to information about how to solve the problem.

The concept of involving intended recipients of population information campaign in problem determination calls for the campaign organizers to listen more to the audience than vice versa. What has dominated intervention programmes in population control, particularly in the developing nations, is an approach that has tended to view recipients of population information campaign as people incapable of recognizing and solving problems. Hence, this viewpoint assumed erroneously that recipients need to be talked to, and not talked with. Thus public information campaigns have been characterized in general by recipients being seen as listeners and not as senders of information. According to Dewey, problems originate from life situations. And in situations in which individuals recognize problems, there is a natural orientation towards information search and the need to communicate to find solutions to the problem.

This shift in emphasis from audience as listeners to audience as information senders recommended in this paper is particularly relevant in dealing with sensitive issues like changing reproductive behaviours of Swazis. It is also appropriate in dealing with a Swazi audience, given the seeming deceptive disposition of Swazis to appear subservient and attentive when talking with non-Swazis. This attitude could be misleading and for one not familiar with the Swazi way of life, may misread it. It is part of the Swazi way of life to assist a stranger by appearing to be cooperative. However, at the end of the day, the Swazi makes up his or her mind when he or she retires to the privacy of his or her home. It is important, therefore, for population information campaign planners in Swaziland to be cognizant of this aspect of Swazi life, and to make full use of local people in selecting campaign workers.

(4) "Lilima" as Community-Based Segmentation

Cox's (1979) definition of a community as including place,

people, shared values and a social system is apt in our audience analysis based on community values. Community-based segmentation enables the campaign to identify and secure the support and participation of key members of the local or community power structure in Swaziland (e.g, chiefs or induvunas). It decreases dependency on limited external resources thus increasing the prospects that project goal will be sustained once the campaign is over. In addition, it enables campaign planners to develop a more accurate assessment of community needs and problems, and to enlist the active involvement of community members in the project.

The Swazi society is not an individualistic one. Swazis love their country. They are proud of their heritage and traditions. In this society national problems are solved by pooling resources together, as was seen during the 1992 drought relief campaign in which a network of private, public and cultural organizations and special interest groups chipped in to tackle a national problem—drought. A community-based approach (Lilima) is an empowering mechanism through which neighbours rally together to help neighbours to solve problems. The concept of "Lilima" can be adopted in an intervention programme to change Swazis attitudes toward fertility management by couching and conveying the problem of overpopulation as an individual problem that will eventually bloat into an uncontrollable national tragedy.

The "Lilima" approach is predicated upon the assumption that the dominant culture forms and shapes individual behaviour, and the individual's social relations are circumscribed in the content of his or her respective communities. Communities as agents of the dominant culture transmit values and norms that symbolically guide some behavioural choices. In addition, the concept of "Lilima" in a population information campaign is premised on the belief that communities act as change agents in achieving social and behavioural outcomes.

Persuasive Message Design

Changing reproductive behaviours in an African context, as has been observed, could be problematic. Hence, interven-

tion programmes should be skillfully and tactfully handled. This means that population information campaigns designed to change the attitudes of Swazis towards reproductive behaviour should balance the values, realities and needs of recipients of population information campaign against national development goals. Therefore, it is important that campaign messages be structured to have personal relevance for the individual recipient of population information campaign materials.

Reproductive behavioural change campaign involves cognitive as well as attitudinal change. This calls for the design of appropriate campaign messages based on relevant persuasion theories. For example, Onyekwere (1991) notes that family planning in Africa has a greater chance of success if it emphasizes both written and oral messages as opposed to only non-verbal communication. This is important because Swaziland is fundamentally an oral society, and for a majority of Swazis, the subjective nature of non-verbal communication symbols poses serious interpretation problems particularly for the illiterate rural population.

Multi-Media Campaign

The nature of Swazi society easily lends itself to the use of multi-media in portraying unplanned and uncontrolled reproductive behaviour as an individual as well as a national problem which, if not solved, will endanger the individual's livelihood. Because the majority of Swazi population, as is the case in most of Africa, is illiterate and poor, and lives in the rural areas, it will be appropriate to use traditional media emphasizing the oral nature of Swazi society (e.g. Tinkhundla and folklore). Modern mass media (e.g. television and newspapers) should be used more in the urban areas, for example, Mbabane and Manzini. Radio, however, is an exception. Because of its ability to overcome linguistic, educational and economic barriers, radio should be used prominently in both the rural and urban areas.

Swaziland is a male-dominated society. Therefore, any information campaign using the media—traditional and modern—should be mindful of this reality. Onyekwere (1991)

observes that one of the neglected avenues to understanding African population problems is the concept of male power and authority over female partners in the family. Campaign information about the risks of having unplanned and uncontrolled reproductive behaviour should be directed more towards Swazi male than their female partners. The objective here will be to persuade them to use their power and authority to influence their partners to adopt family planning practices.

Conclusion

The message that should pervade the entire population information campaign in Swaziland is that economic development is inextricably linked with individual reproductive practices. This message should be conveyed clearly and graphically illustrating the adverse effects of overpopulation, and how unplanned individual reproductive behaviour contributes to overpopulation. It should, for example, stress the fact that Swaziland is a landlocked agricultural state with a fixed land area of 17,365 sq kilometres with a population that might increase to 1.7 million in the next fifteen years. In essence, the campaign should emphasize in graphic and real terms that pressure on available fixed resources, land for example, threatens individual freedom and livelihood.

Information campaigns to reduce birth rates in Swaziland face numerous barriers because of the sensitive nature of the issue of reproductive behavioural control. Reproductive behaviours are likely to be high involvement issues for many Swazis. Therefore, carefully conceived and designed information campaign that balances individual values and needs, national development goals, and driven by the concept of "lilima" will be needed in order to reduce the resistance that might be encountered in an intervention programme in population control in Swaziland. In an addition, a sustained multi-media campaign with messages designed and based on appropriate audience analysis which takes into account the dualistic nature of the Swazi society and the needs and concerns of the recipients of campaign information will make

for a meaningful, less disruptive and sustainable population management in Swaziland.

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