Communicating

for Development Purposes

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Communicating for Development Purposes: A Gender Perspective

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Introduction

There is no longer any uncertainty about the role of communication in development efforts. Actually, MacBride *et al* (1981:199) suggest that communication should pursue three aims: increase understanding of development problems; build up a spirit of solidarity in a common effort; and enlarge the capacity of men and women to take charge of their own development. It is believed that communication can be employed not only to inform and educate the people but also to mobilize them to participate effectively in the development process.

So, to ensure meaningful contribution in the development process, both men and women must have access to the means and content of communication and must participate effectively in communication activities.

Gender is no doubt a significant social factor. It influences the interpretation of experience. Beliefs regarding gender-appropriate behaviour do not only influence how men and women perceive each other but also affects their communication behaviour. It is therefore assumed that gender would have a role to play in the development process.

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This chapter discusses some gender aspects of communication for development.

The Concept of Gender

Gender is socially constructed, not biologically determined (Roberts, 1997). The terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' are used to refer to social constructions of gender, while 'male' and 'female' are used as biological terms to depict sex. It is necessary to mention that while sex differences may be natural and physical, gender differences have their source in culture and not nature. In short, gender is independent of biology; it involves both ideology and material practices and it is enforced through cultural practices.

Gender Roles

Gender role is a set of expectations about what behaviours are appropriate for people of one gender. Oakley (1982:2) notes that:

> People are born female or male but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. They are taught what the appropriate behaviour and attributes are for them and how they should relate to other people. This learned behaviour is what makes up gender identity and determines gender-roles.

Gendering (the acquisition of social characteristics of masculinity or femininity) is a highly complex set of processes involving both psychological events and socialization, which start almost at birth and continue well into adulthood (Young, 1993). Similarly, Mackenzie (1993) explains that the process of gendering goes on during our whole lifetime. As we grow, we learn what roles and responsibilities are expected from girls and boys. Girls are raised to be feminine, while boys are raised to be masculine.

It is important to mention, however, that the masculine gender is socially valued more highly than the female gender (Roberts, 1977). As a result, women as a group have a lower status than men. Research findings reveal that as early as the infant's first day of life, parents tend to perceive their male and female babies in stereotyped ways. In a study, thirty sets of parents of newborns were asked to describe their infants. The daughters were described as beautiful, cute, little, weak and delicate; sons were described as firmer, large-featured, more alert and stronger (Greenglass 1982:1), citing Rubin et al.

Ansu-Kyeremeh (1997:20) also cites an Akan song which asks (on the birth of a baby) "Owoo deeben?" (What's the sex of the new baby?) The response for the boy is "Obarina Katakyie se wo aba a tena ase" (You are welcome to stay, courageous one). Some would even say to the mother, "w'awo nipa", meaning, you have delivered a human being. On the other hand, the response for the arrival of a new baby girl is "Abaayewa feefe w'aba a tena ase" (Beautiful girl, you're welcome to stay).

Ejembi (1997) also reports that gender discrimination was found to start right from birth. Among the Hausa, the birth of a baby boy is greeted with seven ululations, while that of a girl is greeted with three. Moreover, Serbin *et al* (2001) investigated infants' visual preferences for gender-stereotyped toys and their knowledge of stereotyped toys. Findings suggest that both gender-typed preferences and association of objects with gender categories begin during the second year of life.

The foregoing suggests that gender roles are lightly woven into the fabric of society and that an individual acquires the behaviours and personality traits "appropriate" for his or her gender role quite early in life.

Gender role, it must be stressed, has both psychological and social implications as it influences an individual's relationship with others. Gender, should therefore be considered a development planning issue. This has become imperative in view of Massiah's (1993:12) assertion that:

> Until planners become alert to the different roles of men and women in society and consequently, to their differing needs, they will continue to assume that the 'trickle-down' approach they adopt will benefit all persons equally. It is by now documented that women around the world have not benefited from development effort to the same extent as men.

The implication of the foregoing is that development planners need to be gender-sensitive. The need to adopt a gender approach which would not marginalize women or subordinate women's interests to those of men has therefore become imperative. No doubt, the negative images and symbolism that are associated with women can inhibit the potential of women for development.

The Concept of Development

Development is a multifaceted reality. However, although it is

viewed from different angles (social, political, economic), development means one thing to all people — a change for the better; a quality of life. According to Young (1993:14):

> Development implies a change for the better: the ordering of society and social and economic processes in such a way as to lead to the eradication of gross poverty, ill-health, and illiteracy and to rising standards of living and increased material comforts for all.

The South Commission (cited in Young, 1993:14) describes a people-centred development as "a form of development that is self-reliant, equitable, participatory and sustained". It is a process of development achieved through the active participation of the people, in their own interests, as they see them.

These definitions suggest that true development affects citizens' welfare positively and ensures that all citizens have a voice in decision-making process. In essence, development enhances an individual's social opportunities, political freedom and economic security. The possible set of indicators of development are health, mortality, education, welfare, equality, political freedom and economic security.

Moreover, at the first Obasanjo Farm House Dialogue, African leaders identified the keys to development as knowledge, information, technological creativity and organization (Udoakah, 1998).

More importantly, development can be achieved through a deliberately planned, organized and directed communication.

Women's Contribution to Development

Over the years, women have played and are yet playing significant roles in the development and maintenance of society. In other words, women are not only beneficiaries but also participants in development.

Women all over the world have contributed in various ways to the social, political and economic development of the society. In fact, the World Resource Institute recognizes that "women have profound and pervasive effect on the well-being of their families, communities and local ecosystems" (Gamble and Well, 1997:211). Indeed, women have influenced social changes in the society. For instance, in Iran, during the constitutional revolution, women played a highly visible part in the struggles that ensued. The influential historian,

Ahmed Kasravi, reports that "these covered-up creatures of the harem who should not have been even heard by outsiders" came forth to the battlefields. They participated effectively in the public demonstrations (Afshar, 1991:18).

Stead (1991) also reports that Nicaraguan women worked for two decades to overthrow the dictator Somoza, in 1979. Women participated in all the social and political struggles during that period; they made up 30% of the forces which fought the well-equipped army.

The mass protest movement in southern Nigeria is also noteworthy. Since in most civilized societies, the appearance of women in public protest was taken as a sign of the gravity of the situation, women organized massive demonstrations to articulate their demands. The mass movement of the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) against taxation in Abeokuta (1947-1948) is worth mentioning. In protest against a tax increase, under the leadership of Mrs Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, thousands of women embarked on street demonstrations to protect the interest of women.

Also, there were mass protests by women in Eastern Nigeria (1932-1965). The Igbo and Ibibio women defended their interests and the interests of their communities by mass movement of protests. There were protests against taxes, market controls, municipalization and policies inimical to their faith (Mba, 1997).

In essence, women's organizations have played vital roles as political interest and pressure groups. According to Mba (1997:192), women's organization have:

> tried to influence government policies on those matters, such as the franchise for women, taxation of women, educational opportunities for girls and property rights and conditions of service for women which determine the status and roles of women in society.

It is also necessary to point out that in recent times women's organizations and individuals have intensified their efforts in improving the lot of women and the society at large. In fact, women now excel in various professions hitherto looked at as men's exclusive domain. For instance, in high courts, women now sit as judges. In the educational sector, there are now female vice-chancellors and registrars. Examples of women who have made their marks in their chosen professions (in the south-western part of Nigeria) are: Fola Akintunde-Ighodalo (Public Service), Folake Solanke (SAN) (Law), Bolajoko Kuforiji-Olubi (Financial Manage-

ment), Grace Alele Williams, Jadesola Akande, Bolanle Awe (Education), Chioma Ajunwa, Falilat Ogunkoya and Mary Onyali-Omagbemi (Sports).

Approaches to the Involvement of Women in Development

Two main approaches relevant to our discussion are: Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD).

Women in Development

According to Young (1993), the WID approach accentuates the fact that women can do everything men do as well as men. It focuses on women and their experiences and places its major emphasis on individuals and their capacity for self-betterment. It therefore stresses the relevance of "role models" in the development process. One major weakness in the original WID perspective is its exclusive focus on women which suggests that women can become sole agents of their destiny without any corresponding change in men. This probably explains why a key WID strategy is getting women access to cash income. As Young explains, "this strategy derives both from the belief that women's economic dependence on men is the primary cause of their subordination and from confidence in the market itself" (p. 142).

Gender and Development

Some of the key propositions around which the conceptual framework of GAD was constructed are:

- That women are incorporated into the development process in specific ways;
- That a focus on women alone was inadequate to understand the opportunities for women agency or change;
- That women are not a homogeneous category but are divided by class, colour and creed (Young, p. 134).

The GAD approach views women and men as active agents in and not passive recipients of development. From this perspective, the basic problem is not women's integration into development but the structures and processes that gave rise to women's disadvantages. The GAD approach "leads inevitably to a fundamental re-examination of social structures and institutions and ultimately to the loss

of power of entrenched elites, which will affect some women as well as men" (p. 144).

This perspective is much less acceptable to mainstream development because of its emphasis on gender as a relation of power.

The two approaches — WID and GAD — are considered relevant to the development process because both approaches emphasize the importance of women's involvement in decision-making and political power. Both approaches also accept that if only one gender takes decisions about development options, the choices and solutions arrived at will be quite different from when both genders are involved. To this end, it is necessary to bear in mind the gender factor when designing messages for development communication.

Rationale for the involvement of women in the development process

Although men and women live in one world, they experience different realities. Women perform both reproductive and productive roles but the process of development, particularly in developing countries, has marginalized women and deprived them of their control over resources. United Nations statistics indicate that women do two-thirds of the total hours of work done in the world but receive only one-tenth of the world's income and own only one-hundredth of the property in the world (Bhasin, 1992:16).

Since women are the poorer, the more vulnerable, always the worse sufferers from any social evil or economic constraints, women's concerns, perspectives and visions are necessary in development issues. In fact, sustainable development has to be women-centred.

Over the years, women have been known to take care of the basic needs of society. Justifying the inclusion of women in the development process, grassroots women who convened in a superlocation called women, homes and community state that:

> In their role as keeper of community life and nurturers of its human capital, women have a special stake in an inclusive development process where decisions are made in the framework of collective empowerment. (cited in Gamble and Weil, 1997:216)

It is imperative, therefore, to adopt effective development communication strategies that will not subordinate women's

interests to those of men, marginalize women's activities or ignore their contributions in the development process.

Development communication strategies

In this section, the strategies for development communication that is gender-based will be discussed; but first, what is the nature of development communication?

According to Udoakah (1998), development communication is about how communication can be used for organized development. It is an attempt to influence the public to accept new ideas, to win citizens for new ways of doing things. Development communication is therefore corrective, integrative and revolutionary in nature. It is result-oriented. Salawu (2001:13-134) also notes that development communication "stresses access to the media of communication, participation in communication activities and the relevance of content to the socio-cultural context".

In short, development communication has to do with understanding the needs of people, informing the people and mobilizing the people for effective participation in the development process. Effective development communication is therefore people-oriented.

This writer subscribes to the school of thought which believes that the best role for communication in development is: "Promoting self-reliance, participation, equity in distribution and a new rural development and leadership approach" (Hedebro, cited in Nwosu, 1990:31).

Now, to the strategies for communicating for development purposes.

1. Audience/needs analysis

As stated earlier, development communication is people-oriented. Hence, effective development communication is based on audience research. The first task of the development communicator is to identify the target audience and find out their nature and characteristics. Development information would be a waste if it does not reach the right audience.

There is also the need to find out the needs, feelings, interests, aspirations and goals of the target audience. This can best be known by spending time to study the people, particularly those in the rural areas. A good knowledge of the audience and their needs would inform the communication strategies to adopt.

2.   Select appropriate media for development information

There is the need to adopt appropriate channels or media for development-oriented communication. A multiperspectival development of the various communication media is best utilized for development purposes. In other words, a combination of the traditional and modern media is most appropriate for disseminating development information. This is what advocates of development communication refer to as media mix (Ugboajah), the Trado-Modern Communication (Wilson, 1997); Synchronization Approach (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1997).

Traditional media

Traditional communication is no doubt a potent vehicle for development. As Wilson (1997:75) succinctly puts it:

> The traditional media system is a dynamic, multimedia, multichannel system which is authoritative, credible, definitive, time-honoured, transactional, customary and ubiquitous, as well as integrative, low-cost, non-alienating, adaptable and popular.

Considering the foregoing advantages of the traditional media, it is necessary to exploit the use of traditional modes in modern mass media productions.

More importantly, since a vast population live in the rural areas, there is a clear need to adopt effective traditional/rural communication strategies that will reach them and sensitize them on development issues. According to Medis (1986:116), rural communication "must focus the attention of the target audience on the need for change, raise their aspirations and provide the channel through which the people discuss policies and plans leading to constructive and intelligent participation".

Forms of traditional media include gongs, towncriers, drums, dance, rites, rituals, festivals, oral literature, market, village and age-grade forums.

Specific potent traditional communication vehicles for development include:

Group communication

Groups are important instruments in development communication. They can be used to mobilize men and women for development

purposes. As Ansu-Kyeremeh (1997) observes, certain development projects are most effectively implemented through small groups because they facilitate discussion, induce comparison of methods and are easy to manage. Groups can also serve as rallying points for cooperative development activities.

Market women's association

Market women's associations provide a virile channel for communication and development among women. According to Wilson (1997), such associations are capable of providing fora for socialization among their membership; they can provide the womenfolk uninterrupted channels for news, entertainment and education.

Oral tradition

Oral tradition is rich in magical and true stories, legends of all kinds and topics of every nature. The motivating power of oral tradition allows us to examine, disentangle and sort out "the chains that bind our consciences and condition our perspectives, feelings and actions" (Tabora, 1993).

In short, oral tradition allows us to examine the social (gender) implications of the myths and beliefs which men and women are exposed to.

Theatre

Theatre is also a channel for development communication. The theatre can serve as a catalyst for involving men and women in development efforts; the audience should be involved in the productions. Drama presentations should focus on the problems of the people and proffer solutions on how to solve them. Practices, which render daughters as a burden and sons as an asset should also be highlighted and discouraged.

In essence, the audience can be educated through entertainment (edutainment) on gender and development issues.

Articulate leadership

Opinion/decision leaders are important sources when communicating for development purposes. In order to effectively mobilize the followership, leaders must be confident, committed, command respect and be assertive. They must be able to express themselves effectively.

For instance, Mba (1997) reports that Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti retained a highly developed sense of service to the community. She was a charismatic leader whose leadership was accepted primarily because it was effective in realizing the interests of the women. Mrs Kuti elicited deep affection and loyalty from the members of the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU). They regarded her as their "king who made their life better" (Mba, 1997:152). She was a powerful speaker, using expressive, idiomatic language and sharp wit. She also had a flair for the dramatic. Though well educated, she always spoke Yoruba to the women. She ensured that members maintained a cordial relationship.

Modern Media

The modern media are also referred to as technology media. These include, radio, television, books, newspapers, magazines, cartoons. The mass media have, however, been criticized for reinforcing traditional attitudes by casting women mainly in domestic and sexual roles. Gamble and Gamble (1996:60) observe that "our prevalent conceptions of masculinity and femininity are reinforced in the TV shows we view, the films we watch, the books we read, and the toys we play with".

In order to mobilize men and women for development purposes, messages that will create awareness and empower women to participate effectively in development processes should be disseminated through the electronic media (cinema, home-videos, radio and television programmes) and the print media (feature articles, news stories, editorials in newspapers/magazines, books, etc.).

Although some newspapers have women's pages, regular columns on gender and development issues should be created in newspapers and magazines.

3.   Construct relevant development communication messages

The content of development communication messages is very important. Regardless of the media through which development information is disseminated, it is important that credible messages that will enhance the image/self-worth of women are disseminated. It is assumed that individual development would enable women to realize their full potential and contribute effectively to the political,

social and economic development of their societies.

Dovlo (1998:87) asserts that there is

> the need for women to develop and project a new image of themselves — an image that resolves the intellectual and practical inhibitions to their development and the development of the world.

Hence, gender-stereotyping in educational materials (books) and trado-modern media messages should be avoided.

Moreover, there is an urgent need to enlighten men to be gender-sensitive. Messages that would encourage and motivate men to stimulate the interest of women (their wives and daughters in particular) in development programmes should be disseminated. Men should also be exposed to messages on family planning, food and nutritional health, personal hygiene and sanitation.

Also, it is pertinent to state that development messages should stress what the target audience should do rather than what they have failed to do.

4.   Adopt appropriate language

Since development communication is an attempt to influence the people to accept new ideas, to win citizens for new ways of doing things, its success depends on the quality of persuasion and the type of change the citizens are persuaded to accept (Udoakah, 1998). Development communicators should, therefore, adopt a persuasive language and as much as possible, use the language of the target audience.

Moreso, it is necessary to avoid linguistic stereotypes or sexist language. Gender-neutral terms (e.g. chairperson, police officer) should be used in place of sex-stereotyped job titles.

Indeed, appropriate choice of words can give women a sense of belonging, which would encourage them to participate effectively in development programmes.

5.   Adopt a participatory approach

Udoakah (1998), citing Abasiekong, states that "to get citizens to participate in development, those to benefit should be given the opportunity to contribute to the decision on the project". In short, participants in a development programme should be allowed to determine their needs and be involved in the implementation stage.

For example, the audience should be involved in the production of radio and television programmes. They should help in designing development messages that would be transmitted via various media. Actually, it is only the involvement of people in development programmes that can bring about partcipatory development.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have examined some gender aspects of development. The central argument has been that any development programme would require the active involvement of both men and women to succeed.

However, the cultural repressions to which women are subjected have hindered their ability to express their views and potential to contribute meaningfully in the development process. Hence, it is necessary to consider gender issues when planning a development programme. The most urgent priority is to ensure equality in access to development messages and participation in development efforts.

To this end, development messages that would meet the needs of both men and women and eliminate marginalization of women in the development process should be disseminated through relevant traditional and modern media of communication.

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