

**LITERACY FOR
SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
IN A KNOWLEDGE
ECONOMY**

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Edited by
ABBA ABUBAKAR HALADU
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**LITERACY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
IN A KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY**

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Literacy for Sustainable Development in a Knowledge Economy

Essays in honour of

PROFESSOR RASHID ADEWUMI ADERINOYE

edited by

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Literacy Education Towards Utilization of Mass Media for Economic and Social Emancipation of Rural Community Dwellers

I.A. Abiona and C.U. Osu

Introduction

This paper examines the imperativeness of literacy towards the utilization of mass media in the development of rural communities. Mass media connects and informs every sphere of society while also carrying out its role in governance and administration of the state. Government policies are communicated to the people via mass media and its available channels: television, radio, newspapers, films, hand bills and magazines. Developmental goals are promoted and general awareness concerning the society created using the various media. It is advocated that literacy education should be intensified in the rural areas so the rural populace can benefit from the use of mass media to promote development. The paper concludes by pointing out the immense role the mass media can play in rural development, sensitization of the people, and advancement of the general populace in consonance with government's ideological interest.

There is little doubt that communication and the use of the media have been and still are strongly related to ideologies, politics and interests. In the modernization model, donor agencies and national governments counted on the mass media to promote development in the rural areas through 20th century indigenous media like drama. Over the years, governments have become more concerned about the human dimension of development, but mainly in words. More communication facilities and hardware have been acquired but not for the benefit

of rural development. Mass media promotes government policies, campaigns and concerned interests in the communities. However, literacy enhances the understanding and the use of mass media in every society.

Today, the use of mass media for sound emancipation of rural dwellers in the communities has been promoted by participatory development projects, most of which were supported by non-governmental organizations. In this regard, mass media are used to stimulate community discussion and to express the views of the community. Non-governmental organizations support literacy education as the key to rural educational media. In order to make use of the educational media in the rural areas, community members need to have basic literacy.

Concept of Education and Literacy Education

Educators and scholars have expressed different opinions on the concept of education. Anyanwu (1992) defines education as the tool for the integration of the individual effectively into a society, so that the individual can achieve self-realization, develop national consciousness, promote unity and strive for social, economic, political, scientific, cultural and technical progress. Education is the process of transmitting the people's culture, at least part of it, from one generation to the other. From this standpoint, the purpose of education is to introduce people to the cultural heritage of their society and subsequently strive either to maintain or raise the standard of such cultural heritage.

Dewey (1963) described education as "that reconstruction or re-organization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience". This view emphasizes the fact that the main purpose of education is to teach one to think. It is only by learning how to think, and by learning how to sift out the things worth thinking about that we can put ourselves in the best position to enjoy a happy life.

In addition, education should aim at making men and women good citizens. This submission was made as far back as 1964 and the millennium educational goal is dedicated to this objective. Anyanwu (1992) views education as a systematic process through which an individual is exposed to and provided with the opportunity of acquiring knowledge skills, values and attitudes that cumulatively develop with a view to preparing the individual for effective integration into the society. Education could be defined as the process of training and developing knowledge, skills, mind, and character. Educational activities

involve the production and distribution of knowledge, whether they are undertaken in regular institutions of learning or elsewhere.

According to Ingle (1976), learning is a relatively permanent change in behaviour as a result of training and experience. Education, according to this concept, is a cumulative process of development, knowledge, intellectual abilities, skills, values, and attitudes. Education imparts knowledge, values, skills and attitudes which can be beneficial to an individual. Furthermore, UNESCO (1980) reveals that education and learning are ways by which people acquire, interpret and assimilate information, skills and attitudes. This takes place through daily interactions.

Olojede (2012) is of the view that the ability to read and write is required in public institutions and other power sectors. He stated that inadequate literacy skills reduce an individual's capacity to fully participate in society. Aderinoye and Abiona (2003) submitted that "the need and demand for literacy varies in different societies. The concept of literacy now includes media and electronic text. Thus, individuals must be given lifelong learning opportunities to move along a continuum that includes reading, writing, and critical understanding as well as the decision-making abilities they need in their communities."

The Media

The term media is associated with a group of communication devices which spread information to large audiences, i.e. television, radio, newspapers, film and magazines (McLellan, 1986). This is a rather narrow definition of the term, since it does not specifically include the media which mankind formed from its earliest days to communicate i.e. verbal language, body language, dance, music, decorations, ornaments, drawings, etc. Media in its broadest and more fundamental sense refers to all sorts of media people use to exchange ideas.

Classifying the Media

1. **Media generated by the human body.** This category contains all media in which the body is used as an instrument of communication. They include verbal language, facial expression, postures and other forms of body language (including sign language), tattoos and other body decorations;
2. **Objects or substances used in transient communication.** This category encompasses all sorts of substances and objects/instruments man uses in

transient communication. They include instrumental music, smoke signals, flag signals, signals by Morse code, horn signals, perfume, etc;

3. *Objects or substances used to deposit and express ideas.* This category includes all sorts of visual signs used to make people aware of something (including traffic signs), architecture ornaments, drawings, text paintings, photographs, etc. These media can convey ideas beyond the context of interpersonal communication.
4. *Complex Media.* Complex media combines aspects belonging to two or more of the above mentioned categories. Striking examples of complex media are rituals and the performing arts, like dance, songs, puppet shows, theatre and opera. They combine verbal language (except in dance), body language, music, sets, artifacts, clothing decorations and the like. Although they make use of more permanent media, the complex media are transient while their communicative value is momentary i.e. at the moment of performance.
5. *Mass Media.* This category covers all media that enables one to disseminate ideas to large audiences through electronic means. This consists of all printed media (books, newspapers, magazines, posters, leaflets, wall charts, and flip charts) recordings, radio, television, film, slide, tape programmes, cassette and video programmes. Of these forms of media, television and radio are transient, in other words, they communicate at the moment of broadcasting (Gosh, 1986; Ingle, 1976).

However, most mass media have little communicative value of their own; they are information-carrying technologies and serve mainly as vehicles for other traditional media. The print media serve as a vehicle for written language, drawings and pictures; radio for verbal language, etc, although most mass media allow communication without direct interpersonal contact, in which case some are designed and can be used as institutional materials.

According to Ingle (1976), there is a distinction between 'hot and cool' media. A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in high definition. High definition is the state of being well filled with data. A photograph is visually high definition, a cartoon is low definition simply because little information is usually provided.

A telephone, on the other hand, is a cool medium, or of low definition, because the ear is given a meagre amount of information. Speech is a cool

medium of low definition because little is given and so much has to be filled in by the listener. Schramm (1964) correctly pointed out that McLuhan (1974) had not been entirely consistent in classifying the media. He distinguishes a hot medium like radio from a cool one like the telephone; and a hot medium like the movie from a cool one like television. Although some generalization could be made about audiences for the mass media, some media seem to have local audiences that are limited to particular geographical areas; examples are local newspapers, state radios which cover limited areas and state TV stations or cable TV systems with limited coverage and access.

Lack of feedback was an outstanding characteristic of the mass communication systems but this has improved considerably over the years with the advancement of technology and technical know-how. However, the speed of light cannot be compared with the speed of sound, hence the continued delay in feedback transmission. It should be noted however, that without feedback, mass media programmes may not exist and it would be difficult to know what the audience would like to read, watch and hear. Mass media programme producers are interested in pleasing the largest possible audience in the face of competition and in search of maximum profit. This can only be possible by encouraging feedback from the audience using scientific approaches such as audience survey, media impact studies and interviews.

Justification for the Use of Mass Media

Mass communication messages are designed for relatively large heterogeneous and anonymous audiences. They are not impersonal media as often described because scientific investigations are conducted to understand the audience and the messages are personalized as much as possible. The audience may not be seen in most cases, yet they are known and are involved in the message development and production. In mass media programming, the following factors need to be considered.

- i. It is often the cheapest way of reaching a large number of people;
- ii. It may be the only means for reaching isolated communities or families and other hard-to-reach audiences. It can reach people in the most intimate environment, even the bedrooms;
- iii. It can be used in both individual and group discussions

- iv. Printed media can provide a constant reference, as a person can keep a leaflet and refer to it at any time;
- v. Radio and TV can be very timely, particularly for advice on technical issues;
- vi. Mass media have feedback mechanisms;
- vii. Mass media allow for multi-media mix to aid effective communication, and
- viii. When time is a constraint to visiting every client and there is the need to pass information quickly to the audience, the mass media is applicable.

Mass media can be used to package carefully prepared persuasive messages for less-friendly audiences.

Mass Media and Enlightenment

Literacy enhances the utilization of the media, while the media cannot be overlooked in ensuring popular participation in development activities. Man has another fundamental need beyond the physical requirement of food and shelter – the need to communicate with his fellow human beings. This urge for communication is important and in contemporary civilization, it is a necessity for survival. The importance of communication in creating awareness of public events among the citizens is highlighted in the speech by the Director-General of UNESCO in Abiona (2003) ... *it is not the children of today who hold the present destiny of African in their hands, it is the adults*. So it is only by establishing effective communication with the adult population, by helping them to adjust to a rapidly changing world, that an immediate impact can be made on the urgent problems of society and essential progress be brought about.

Communication can be defined simply as the art of transmitting information, ideas and attitudes from one person to another. Viewed in a wider scope, it embraces the use of the television and radio media channels and in fact all technological gadgets which, if properly manipulated, could be used to serve as an extension of human needs in the dissemination of thoughts, ideas, values or information to a wider array of audience as fast as possible (*UNESCO World Communication Report*, 1980). Mass media is invaluable for enlightenment in the society. This is further stressed by Braimoh as cited by (Elliot, 1999) that communication is basic to the very existence of every organization no matter the size. Even at the most primitive level, man needs to know what the weather is likely to be, what supply of food can be expected, the moving of nearby tribes and

herds, and many other things. Even organizations need to know what is going on among all groups they associate with and how to reach the various members of the public they deal with.

Information solves the problem of uncertainty because the more uncertainty is eliminated, the greater the capacity for decision making and conversely, the higher the level of uncertainty, the less the ability to make decisions. For instance, if we wake up on a particular morning and notice that there are no newspaper vendors on our streets, we turn on our radio sets and there is no transmission, then switch on our television sets and no sound or picture is produced, we would feel as if the world is coming to a standstill.

As early as 1948, Harold Lasswell had divided the functions of communication in society into three distinct headings, viz. surveillance of the environment, correlation of the parts of the society in responding to the environment, and the transmission of social heritage from one generation to the next. In other words, in the context of mass media, communication is reporting, interpreting and educating. The above precisely means that, the main role of mass media in the society is to inform, educate and entertain. Here, the communicator is looked at as a catalyst; the ear, eyes and even mouth piece of the public; and of course, the motivator of the society towards embracing a change-oriented programme with the use of electronic gadgets, coupled with the necessary communication strategies to create awareness in the target audience.

It can be seen from these all-embracing definitions outlined that communication is embedded in all forms of interaction. Therefore, in using the media for public enlightenment, all forms of communication channels should be employed in transmitting messages, using multifarious strategies with varying intensities on the audience, all aimed at creating favourable effects, awareness and mobilizing the target audience towards accepting a social change, instead of the face-to-face traditional method of enlightenment which was rather slow for development in modern day systems. "Experience from some parts of Africa and from Latin America has shown that the media can be effective, if properly employed, especially as a complement to the face to face method" (Elliot, 1999).

Complementary Media

The media approach has enabled the barrier of lack of awareness to be crossed and distances to be eliminated. It has made the services of the few experts around available to the whole nation and has ensured motivation and general mobilization.

It has also helped to enlist the sympathy and empathy of urban and rural populations. The problem that usually arises when a decision to use the mass media has been made is the choice of the right medium or media. The choice depends on the assurance that the target audience will be reached. The choice of media also affects what people learn or know, and how quickly and well they do so. However, recent thinking on the use of the mass media for public enlightenment strongly favours a multi-media approach. This is because some media are better suited to certain activity than others. The three most popular mass media — television, radio and newspaper — are available in many African countries, but the extent of their availability, usability and accessibility differs greatly between the urban and rural areas. The use to which each of these media can be put in public enlightenment is dictated by three factors:

- i. availability;
- ii. usability, and
- iii. accessibility for the different socio-economic groups in each location.

The determination of these factors ensures appropriate and fruitful utilization.

Radio

Radio can be used to great advantage to publicize and mobilize heterogeneous audiences. This is because of the strong effect it has on the listeners. This model postulates that the mass media has direct, immediate and powerful effect on mass audiences, even though it is more of a one linear flow communication model, without the advantage of immediate feedback to the source, which is unlike face-to-face communication. However, in recent times, phone-in programmes have reduced this disadvantage to a large extent. The advantages of radio are more than its disadvantages and many African leaders have used it successfully, to ward off threats by enemies, and remain in government. Radio can serve a useful purpose in creating awareness, if adverts and jingles are skillfully done, and the messages well designed and slotted in at regular intervals.

Radio has the advantage of being portable, transferable and accessible. It does not have geographical barriers to its reception. All these contribute to it being rated as the best medium for disseminating information to a wide heterogeneous audience in a fast way. However, radio lacks visual sense since not all people can grasp information for adequate utilization the same way.

Television

Television offers the advantage of sight and sound; and with improved transportation system, it is no longer difficult to transport it to far distances. It can also be in used in the rural areas with the aid of an electricity generating plant, batteries or even solar energy. Those that are literate have the opportunity to understand written information on the television. Where poverty does not allow for many people to own television sets, especially in the rural areas, a viewing centre could be created. This makes television very useful for public enlightenment. However, the audience to be reached by television has to be segmented because different groups of people are interested in different kinds of programmes. Television can offer the services of enlightenment easily through the various programmes it transmits. The phone-in programmes have broken the disadvantages of one linear flow of communication to some extent, because people now react immediately to some programmes on television. Television is a highly motivating medium which can affect one's attitude after having been exposed to change messages. Plays can be scripted and acted for television viewing, using local language and people as base.

Mobile Film

Success could be achieved in this direction if the information ministry will cooperate with the Ministry of Health to produce screen plays, debates and so on, with salient educational or enlightenment messages to be shown at strategic points like market places, town halls and in the rural areas.

Print Media and Rural Literacy

The print medium has an enduring characteristic which neither radio nor television possess. The newspaper for example can be read and re-read at convenience, thus allowing for further understanding of content materials and the preservation of materials that are considered important. In this regard, the printed word would appear to be best suited for enlightenment. The illiterate population of the rural areas, however, cannot be educated with the city newspaper in the form which it is nowadays. The cultural dimension of communication for development says that what is needed is rural press. This rural press will be in the form of mimeos and newspapers, which will be printed by the rural people themselves and would be suitable for their enlightenment. They would highlight the problems of the rural areas in relation to the nation and will serve as media for promoting development.

Selecting the Right Medium

Selecting the best medium for the educational purpose in mind may not always be feasible because of financial or logistic reasons, or because the conditions under which the medium has to be used may not be favourable. It should be recalled that in the development context, few media are designed to be free standing sources of information. Most media are developed and used as aids to educators, trainers and instructors to help them increase the effectiveness of their educational activities. However, the most desirable medium is the one that is most readily available and fits a given need in a given place at a given time (Schramm, 1964). Choosing the right medium is a process whereby the feasibility of certain desirable options is examined vis-à-vis the prevailing conditions regarding the production, distribution and utilization of the media. The right medium is the best possible option under the prevailing conditions. The process of selecting the right medium is a complex one which must put the following into consideration:

- ▶ the topic of communication;
- ▶ the learning objectives;
- ▶ the knowledge, experience and preferences of the audience (regarding topic, format and medium) and
- ▶ level and format of the message. (*UNESCO World Communication Report, 1980*)

The Media in Rural Development

After independence, most developing countries established national television and radio broadcasting systems to support the process of creating national unity and to propagate the interests of the ruling party (McLellan, 1986). This was done partly for political and partly for developmental reasons. Donor agencies underscored the development potential of the mass media and assisted local governments in the establishment of facilities and training of broadcasting personnel. In many countries, education projects were set up but only a few of the projects proved sustainable and the impact of mass media on rural development processes remained modest.

Over the years, governments have become more concerned about the human dimension of development but mainly in words, not in action. More communication facilities and hardware have been acquired but not for the benefit of rural development. Mass media are still used for political propaganda, to serve

and promote government policies, campaigns and interests. Similarly, smaller media on the other hand, have a long history in rural development; slides, filmstrips and printed materials have been used extensively in campaigns and to support training and extension activities. Today, the use of media for awareness-raising and empowerment of the people has been promoted by participatory development projects, most of which are supported by non-governmental organizations. Hence in these projects, the media are used to stimulate common discussions and express the views of the community.

Every communicator and media developer dreams of having all the necessary facilities, abundant funds, and the latest information that would enable him/her produce and disseminate the best possible materials to all members of the target audience. Choosing the 'best' medium, for most media developers in the Third World, is a hypothetical case, because the lack of means or the prevailing circumstances do not give room for many options. In practice, one may not be able to do more than select the right medium for the given circumstances, which, for that matter is quite an achievement. A number of limitations influence the selection of media for development purposes. There are limitations with regard to production, distribution as well as utilization of the media.

The development of educational materials requires adequate resources. These consist of production facilities, funds, materials, skilled manpower, expertise and management potential. These commodities are in short supply, a situation which is aggravated by a deteriorating economic situation that affects the availability of the materials and equipment necessary for the production and the dissemination of information.

Many countries also face serious logistic problems in delivering goods and services to targeted beneficiaries. These goods and services include information, education and training. In most cases, this situation is caused by a lack of infrastructure, shortage of human and financial resources, and weaknesses in organizational and management capabilities.

In the planning of extension campaigns and educational programmes, these facts should receive serious attention. The choice of a medium should not only be determined by theoretical distribution potential but also the actual distribution situation prevailing in the country. Traditional channels of communication may achieve better coverage than the so-called mass media. The country might be gifted with a reasonably functional network of government and non-governmental services, delivering extension and educational messages to all corners of the

country. In such a case, it makes more sense to develop and distribute educational materials which can assist field-based officers and educators in their daily work. Media which are most suitable for this purpose are all group media and printed materials. Local conditions and resources will determine which of these media are appropriate and effective for the purpose intended.

Another critical issue which determines the effectiveness of audiovisual aids is whether the users i.e. the educator, extensionists and instructors have the skills to use the material effectively. The effect of a well-produced educational aid can be ruined if it is not properly used by the educator, to include educational and practical dimensions. Educational aids have to be used as part of a plan integrated into the educational methods employed to obtain certain educational objectives. During a lesson or extension, the material has to be slotted in at the right time with a proper introduction and follow-up. An educator who uses educational materials so that he can lean back and relax certainly uses the wrong approach.

Another point which influences the choice and use of a particular medium is familiarity. Communication takes place more efficiently and effectively when the format and channel of communication are familiar to the receiver. Stories and jokes are well-known formats to people and people with an oral tradition are capable of memorizing detailed information even if they hear the stories only once. The issue of familiarity is also applicable to media and educational materials. Radio is an excellent medium to convey information to rural audiences in developing countries because the channel of communication is closely related to their oral tradition. Another good medium is interpersonal communication because this is the way in which most information is exchanged in communities. Not surprisingly, around the world, rural audiences choose the extension officer as the preferred source of information on development matters.

Conclusion

Literacy education facilitates proper usage of communication media in development. These media have been discussed with regard to the role they play in rural development programmes. They perform educational tasks in support of broader communication objectives. Some of the media are meant to convey an educational message to the audience directly, while others are developed to facilitate the teaching process of the educator, trainer or field agent. Because of their different characteristics, they perform best in combination as this

complements the educational potential of each and every medium. Combinations of media are successfully employed in various national campaigns.

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