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PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS OF INFORMATION POLICY FORMULATION FOR GRASS-ROOT MOBILIZATION: A CASE STUDY OF AN IGBO SOCIETY OF NIGERIA.

By
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Department of Library, Archival and Information Studies,
University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Abstract

This study examined appropriate information policy for grass-root mobilization with a focus on an indigenous setting of an Igbo society of Nigeia. The paper also looked at peculiar information system that militates against the use of indigenous information system, for mobilization and development.

The method of data collection is anthropoligically grounded. Focus groups discussion (FGD) was used in this study to collect data from the people. The data were quantitatively analyzed. It has been revealed that the non-involvement of the rural people in the society in the planning and implementation of rural development activities has greatly affected their successes. The study, therefore, recommends the inclusion of the rural people from the initiation to the execution of any project. Many problems were also identied as militating against the use of indigenous information system for grassroot mobilization. These include limitation in scope, language/dialectical problem, alienation, lack of bureaucratical organization, attitude of the town criers, suspicion, low level of technology, dictatorial tendency of some local rulers etc.

Introduction

One of the basic needs for human existence is information. Information according to Aboyade (1981) is a pre-requisite to rural development. Information is generally said to form the commonwealth of mankind which is wisdom for whoever possesses it (Saunder 1980).

Despite the importance of this essential resource, it has been observed that it is not easily accessible in the rural area of our society. The resultant effect of the non-availability of this "scarce commodity" is its non-utilization in the initiation, planning and execution of development programmes in our general societies.

The non-availability of information in the rural areas has been attributed to inappropriate use of exogenous system of information dissemination which is alien and unfamiliar to the people who are to benefit from it. According to Ugboaja, 1980, these exogenous systems failed because of their inability to restablish a drain of mutual dependence between the traditional and cultural diameter of the peasant villages and its own new stimuli.

However, recent development have shown growing appreciation for indigenous knowledge. For example, with the re-orientation of policy which several international development agencies have introduced on the basis of AGENDA 21, the global programme of action at the Earth Summit, held in Rio De Janeiro in June 1992, there is growing appreciation for indigenous knowledge and the immense contributions it can make to development activities by development workers and policy makers.

Statement of Problem

With the failure of the exogenous information system, there is the need to formulate a policy on information dissemination at the rural areas based strictly on indigenous knowledge and information system that is familiar to the people for whom the programme or policy is meant for.

Policy can be defined as a set of principles and strategies which should guide a course of action in the attainment of a given goal or objective (Nwalo, 1994). In this study the objective of this policy formulation for grass-root mobilization is to encourage the active participation of every individual in development programmes with a view to achieving the objectives of the programme. Information policy here therefore relates to the availability, organization, management, dissemination, sharing and utilization of information as a resource and a means of mobilization for the achievement of development objectives.

However, problems arise when the objectives of a set programme cannot be attained largely because the people who are to benefit from the programme are not aware of what is happening.

There is, therefore, the need to formulate a policy which wil ensure the success of development programmes in the rural areas, using the local and familiar system of information dissemination. The above aptly supports Fannon's position when he said:

> To take past in African revolution
> It is not enough to write a revolution
> Song, you must fashion the revolution
> with the people. And if you fashion it
> with the people the songs will come b
> by themseles and of themselves p. 166

Methodology

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was used to collect data for this study. Essentially this involved a group discussion that gathered people together from similar backgrounds and experiences to discuss topics central to the objectives of this study. Generally the participants were purposively chosen. Focus groups were conventionally homogenous, that is, the participants were recruited to particular groups on the basis of some common characteristics, to maximize within the group, and to

avoid a situation where individuals dominate or withdraw because of difference in class, sex, age, experience, acquired knowledge, or any other characteristics salient to the discussion.

The discussion were also characterized by group dynamic. The informal setting, relaxed atmosphere and open-ended nature of questions were used to encourage participants to feel free from the constraint typical of one to one interview and ensured they expressed their views openly and spontaneously. The settings of the discussions on this research were in the neutral and natural settings. For instance, the Ekiewu Okuku market square and the Okuku community school were used as venues. The researcher allowed for sufficient time for the recruitment of members of the group. Also the time of session (date and hour) were appropriate and convenient to the members. The size of the groups ranges from 5-15. The researcher also acted as a facilitator. He was responsible in ensuring that the discussions were conducted in a relaxed manner bearing in mind the objectives of the research. The researcher made use of a discussion guide which had earlier been prepared. The discussion guide the researcher used in this study was based on the headings which are central to the objectives of the study:

In the study, the facilitator/researcher was ably assisted by a note taker/recorder. The following materials/instruments were made available for the exercise: tape recorder, cassettes, paper, pencils, biros etc. The note taker, took notes during the session and recorded the discussions. He was able to retain the impression and information given by members of the group.

In most of the sessions, entertainments were provided for the members of the group. This in no small way encouraged them and showed that the researcher is appreciative of their time and energy in honouring the researchers' calls.

In all, most of the sessions went on as planned. The record of discussions was complete and accurate.

QUESTION GUIDE

1. Are you always involved in the planning and execution of rural development programmes that directly affect your lives?
2. Do you think that effective mobilization of rural prople for participation in development programmes will enhance the success of such programmes?
3. What suggestions would you like to give rural development workers to assist them in the planning and execution of internally and externally initiated development programmes?
4. Do you see any problem in the use of indigenous channels for development communication in the rural area?
5. Describe the nature of these problems.

6. You have talked about bureaucracy which you said is lacking in the indigenous system, do you see the government bureaucratic set-up as being able to accommodate the indigenous system?

Communication Policy Formulation for Grassroot Mobilization

The success of communication policy formulation for grassroot mobilization depends to a large measure on the degree of involvement of the generality of the people who are to benefit from it (Aboyade, 1990:15). This is with a view to encouraging the active participation of every individual with other individual and group in the various programmes.

	government policy
14 Seek the opinion of the elites only	+
	+
	-
	-
	-
	+
	+
	-
	-
	+
	-
	-
	+
	+
	-

KEY: + Enhances success of programmes
- Does not enhance success of programme

Table 8

Communication Policy Formulation for Grassroot Mobilization

VARIABLES		GROUPS																					
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
1	Local Participation	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+
2	Exogenous Information	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	Involvement of rural people at planning stage	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+
4	Deliberate mobilization	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	-	÷	+	+	+
5	The use of Exogenous channel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6	The use of indigenous channels	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+
7	Involvement of rural people at execution stage	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+
8	Adoption of bureaucratic approach	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
9	Enough time for mobilization	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	+
10	Education of illiterate rural people	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+
11	Target audience research	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
12	Understanding core value of Africa	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
13	Impose government policy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
14	Seek the opinion of the elites only	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	+

KEY: + Enhances success of programmes

- Does not enhance success of programme

Majority of rural development workers in the discussion as shown in Table I indicated that planning successful rural development programme depends on a number of factors of which effective information and the involvement of the primary beneficiaries are one.

> "These development workers relate to us as if we are slaves while they are master. if they allow us to know what they are doing and are open-minded enough to consider our own positions, then the work will be easy for all of us".

According to them, this will facilitate appropriate information policy for the mobilization of the rural people. Local participation and the use of appropriate channels of information will significantly enhance the process. In this regard, the opinion of rural development workers on the planning process was sought. They were asked whether they ever involved rural people in the planning of rural development programmes that directly affect their lives.

The analysis of their opinion shows more than half of all the rural development workers in the survey (68%) indicated that they do not involve the rural people in the planning process of rural development. They listed lack of time and high rate of illiteracy of rural people as being responsible for their decision. According to them, rural people do not possess the relevant knowledge regarding the intricacies of the programme because they are not educated. They then assume that the decisions they take and subsequently the programme they plan for rural people will be accepted by them willingly.

In order to achieve the objective of this study as it affects information policy formulation for effective Grassroot Mobilization, it was generally agreed that effective mobilization of rural people for participation in development programme will enhance the success of such programme. The analysis of their views shows that majority (81%) of the population of rural development workers in the study emphasised the need to achieve effective mobilization of rural people for participation in the development process, especially government or externally initiated programmes through the use of appropriate information channels that are indigenous to the people.

Specifically (75%) mentioned the use of Town Criers 64%, indicated songs, folktales 61%, village heads 60%, the Eze 60%, local associations 54%, market women, 50%, festivals, 48%, oral poetry 40%, drum 4% etc. To have effective result they suggested the need for what they called target Audience research. This will enable them to know and appreciate the norms, beliefs and value system of the people. This knowledge of the people will no doubt help them in penetrating and mobilizing the people for development processes.

Finaily, to ensure proper mobilization 76% of the population of

rural development workers in the study saw the need to involve the people in the planning and execution of rural programmes especially those initiated by government and development agencies.

Peculiar Information Problems in the Use of Indigenous Information Systems for Mobilization

Data for this analysis were derived mainly from the people of the community that formed the population for development agents. These include Owerri West Local Government, Imo State Rural Development Agency, Imo State Ministry of Information and Culture and Ministry of Chieftaincy and Community Development.

The respondents in this group were purposively selected. The researcher focused on the community leaders who were involved in rural development, who have had experience in the job and were directly involved in interaction and development of the people.

Table II

Participants views on the problems Militating Against the use of Indigenous Channel of Information for Mobilization

PROBLEMS		GROUPS																					
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
1	Limited Scope	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	-
2	Language Dialectical Problem	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+
3	Alien	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	Complexity	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	Lack bureaucratic organization	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	-
6	Suspicion	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7	Low level of Technology	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+
8	Illiteracy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
9	Attitude of Local authority (Eze)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+
10	Attitude of the town crier	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
11	Attitude of local union leaders	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	+
12	Lack Encouragment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

KEY + Identified as a problem by a member in that group

\- Not identified as a problem by a member in that group.

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1 Limited Scope	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	-
2 Language Dialectical Problem	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	-
3 Alien	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4 Complexity	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5 Lack bureaucratic organization	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	-
6 Suspicion	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7 Low level of Technology	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+
8 Illiteracy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
9 Attitude of Local authority (Eze)	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+
10 Attitude of the town crier	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
11 Attitude of local union leaders	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	+
12 Lack Encouragment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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2 Language Dialectical Problem	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	-
3 Alien	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4 Complexity	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5 Lack bureaucratic organization	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	-
6 Suspicion	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7 Low level of Technology	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+
8 Illiteracy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-
9 Attitude of Local authority (Eze)	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+
10 Attitude of the town crier	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
11 Attitude of local union leaders	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+
12 Lack Encouragment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

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1 Limited Scope	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	-
2 Language Dialectical Problem	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	-
3 Alien	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4 Complexity	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5 Lack bureaucratic organization	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	-
6 Suspicion	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7 Low level of Technology	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+
8 Illiteracy	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-
9 Attitude of Local authority (Eze)	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+
10 Attitude of the town crier	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
11 Attitude of local union leaders	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+
12 Lack Encouragment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

KEY + Identified as a problem by a member in that group
- Not identified as a problem by a member in that group.

The respondents were asked to describe the problems they encountered in the use of the indigenous channels for development mobilization.

The respondents were able to identify some problems that prevent them from making use of the local communication channels. One of the problems identified as shown in Table II was that these traditional media of communication are not mass media hence they are limited in scope and area of coverage due to language or dialectical barrier. This problem ranked highest with 87% of the respondent indicating it. They argued that the nature of the media makes it difficult for the rural development workers to make use of them. The limitation in the areas of coverage also delays their mobilization and development information efforts. In their remark "We have to virtually touch every household before our message can be said to have been delivered".

Secondly, about 82% of the respondents indicated that the problems of the use of indigenous channels for development information is what the respondents called "the complexity of the indigenous media of information". According to them the "complexity makes it difficult for the rural development worker to understand them and take advantage of their flexibility to incorporate the exogenous messages into them".

The problem of lack of bureaucratic organization ranked third as 70% of the people in the groups indicated it. They opined that this lack of formal organization makes it difficult for bureaucratically organized ministry and parastatals to make use of them. The result of this they argue is that the growth and development of indigenous information systems are retarded. The indigenous information channels have been observed by the respondents to be informal and people oriented in nature. "The people seem to understand the workings of the channels; this is not so with government set-up".

Another problem with the use of indigenous information system for communicating exogenous messages is what the respondents referred to as 'low level of technology'. This problem ranked fourth as 68% of the opinion that the 'low level of technology" associated with local information channels makes it impossible for them to transcend space. Also the time value of message sent with these traditional channels of information is affected. The workers argued that time is of essence in development information process because of this problem they tend to favour exogenous channels most of the time in communicating development messages to the rural people.

Ranking fifth in the problems faced with the use of indigenous channels of development information for mobilization rural community is the attitude of local authorities. Sixty five percentage of the respondents indicated this problem in the use and growth of indigenous method of informatioon. The rural development workers opined that local authorities such as the EZE, the Union Leaders, market Women

ithoritarian and sometimes political in nature. This according to spondents affects the contents of information communicated and ccess in the mobilization of the people.

ixthly, about 60% of the respondent indicating it is the problem of they called "lack of terminology" in the use of indigenous ods of communication. The position of the respondents here is ndigenous channels like songs, town criers, folktales, festivals, rbs have no terminology that are universally accepted. This lack iversally acceptable terminology limits the values of indigenous els of information as they are merely restricted to their locality

Summary

above problems which militate against the use of indigenous nation system for grass-root mobilization can be summarised as vs:

he findings of this study showed that these traditional media of formation are not mass media hence they are limited in scope d areas of coverage due to language or dialectical barriers.

he complexity of the indigenous media of communication makes difficult for the rural development worker to understand them d take advantage of their flexibility to incorporate the exogenous essage for grass-root mobilization.

lany indigenous communication channels lack bureaucratic ganisation established to make use of them. This lack of use by ureaucratic establishment retards the growth and development of digenous information systems which enhance mobilization.

nother problem with use of indigenous information systems for mmunicating exogenous messages, aimed at mobilizing the rural eople is low levels of technology. The result of this is that digenous communication system does have the capacity to anscend space, the time value of messages sent with these ditional channels communication is affected.

he findings in this study also identified the attitude of the local uthorities as being a problem in the use and growth of indigenous ethods of communication. The local authorities are authoritarian their nature and this affects content of information and the action of the people.

ural development workers were involved in this study because of le they play in development information. Findings on them d that none of the rural development workers has an additional ication in information work and skills to enhance their duties as of mobilization in the rural areas. Also majority of them lack the edge of the people as they said that there was no target audience ch to determine their norms, values and beliefs before doing their

work.
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work.

A considerable number of rural development worker corroborated the position of the rural people that they are never involved in the planning and implementation of rural development programmes. This is because these programmes are communicated through exogenous channels including radios, television etc.

The study also looked at information media used by rural development workers in communicating exogenous messages on externally initiated development programmes to rural people, the findings showed that majority of rural people used radios, talks, motion pictures and slides.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, to ensure proper mobilization of the people for grass-root development, government and rural development agents must appreciate the need to carry the people along in their efforts. In order to achieve this the development agents must not ignore the already entrenched information system in these rural areas because they are local and familiar to the people who are the potential beneficiaries of the programme.

However, some problems have been identified in the use of these indigenous information system. For proper and effective mobilization therefore efforts must be geared towards the elimination of all identified problems in the use of the system that is fashioned by the people themselves. This is because they offer opportunities for participation of local people in information among themselves and with development professionals and decision makers, which results in overall mobilization.

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