

Social Mobilisation: Tool for Effective Grassroots Communication for National Transformation*

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The thesis of this paper is that meaningful and lasting development can only be based on the mobilisation of our people for effective transformation of the developmental process. However, the continuing search by Nigeria since independence for more dynamic, efficient and relevant strategies of achieving real development does imply frustration with past attempts as well as our inability to maximally and positively exploit these resources for the upliftment and well-being of the Nigerian people. This has resulted in the marginalisation of the vast majority of the people in the transformation process, particularly because of the low level of their education and, therefore, low consciousness which not only made them vulnerable to fraudulent manipulations by politicians, but has created among them a culture of *helplessness*, *apathy* and *indifference* about the happenings in the political and economic process.

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Mobilisation sociale: instrument pour une communication des masses efficace pour une transformation nationale

Résumé

La thèse de cet article est basé sur l'idée que tout développement significatif et durable ne peut qu'être axé sur la mobilisation de nos populations pour une transformation du processus de développement efficace. Cependant, la quête continuelle du Nigéria depuis son accession à l'indépendance des stratégies plus dynamiques, efficaces et appropriées pour aboutir au développement n'insinue pas la déception des efforts du passé ainsi que notre incapacité à faire usage maximal et positif de ces ressources pour le développement et le bien-être du peuple nigérian. Le résultat a été la négligence de la grande majorité du peuple dans le processus de transformation, plus, spécialement à cause du niveau bas de leur éducation et, par conséquent, l'inconscience relative qui, non seulement les a rendu vulnérables aux manipulations frauduleuses des politiciens, mais aussi a créé en eux une culture d'incapacité, d'apathie et d'indifférence aux actualités du processus politique et économique.

Introduction

There is in Nigeria all that it takes to aspire and achieve greatness — massive and fertile land resources, well-researched packages of technological innovations, favourable weather all year round, considerable financial resources and a huge, creative labour force. What is lacking, according to extensive research conducted by the Political Bureau of 1987, is the near absence of a central body to mobilise the abundant resources at the country's disposal through the intricate use of linkages such that development becomes relational rather than terminal as was the case in the past. Going by the various development plans executed in Nigeria, it is clear that ideas and resources are not what we lack but the ability to translate the beautifully-packaged ideas into concrete developmental programmes. The effective mobilisation and organisation of millions of small-scale farmers and entrepreneurs into viable producer co-operatives will certainly go a long way in stimulating material production to satisfy the demands of the society. The bedrock of a self-reliant economy is material production and since there is a dialectical relationship between production and consumption, material production plays a decisive role. Human beings are, therefore, the active agents in any development process, hence:

...development does not start with goods and things. It starts with people — re-orientation, organisation and discipline. When the accent of development is on things, all human resources remain latent, untapped, potential, and a society can remain poor amidst the most opulent material resources. On the contrary, when a society is properly oriented, organised and disciplined, it can be prosperous on the scantiest basis of natural wealth. (*Ministry of National Planning*, 1980, pp. 20-21).

Basically, therefore, genuine development is deeply-rooted in the qualitative transformation of a nation's human resources. Development essentially relates to the capacity and creative capability of a people to effectively transform natural resources of their environment into goods and services through the imaginative application of their creative talents and labour power. This clearly debunks the erstwhile view in Nigeria that money is the basis of development. If this were so, the billions of naira that have been expended on various projects particularly during the oil boom days would have taken us to the developed nations club. Unfortunately, our development planning had been on sectional allocation of financial resources, with the naive hope that the flow of foreign technology and experts will develop our society while our own people watch with admiration. Even then, a study of the economic history of any of the developed countries, be it socialist or capitalist, has clearly revealed that:

No development had been possible without the mobilisation of farmers, without a transformation of social relations and without the intelligent application of human creativity for the transformation of resources into goods and services. (Gana, 1987).

Rationale for a Social Mobilisation Agency

Social mobilisation is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. Indeed, it has always been uppermost in most development programmes of the country with varying degrees of success and names. In August 1975, for example, all the Commissioners for Information and Cultural Affairs met for five days in Lagos discussing 'Dynamic Publicity for Mass Mobilisation' in Nigeria. In the past ten years, there have been the Jaji Declaration, Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, National Orientation Movement, Reconstruction, Reconciliation and Rehabilitation programmes of Nigeria's post-civil war. Other examples of mass mobilisation of Nigerians for specific social programmes include the currency change-over (1971), traffic change (1973), National Census (1973), and metrification (1973). Social mobilisation clearly has ancestry and, with the benefit of hindsight, the factors that made our current economic, disciplinary and moral problems possible made the latest attempt at social mobilisation via MAMSER inevitable.

The previous programmes were fundamentally flawed because each addressed just one part of a multifaceted problem. Operation Feed the Nation and Green Revolution were concerned with the country's economic problems in relation to food production. It properly saw the abandonment of agriculture as the cause of the problem but failed to see it as merely symptomatic of a much larger national problem. The Jaji Declaration, Ethical Revolution and War Against Indiscipline fell into the same temptation of mistaking the part for a whole. Tough talking and *koboko* discipline were seen as the panacea for societal ills. Unfortunately, as soon as the coercive measures were removed, people relapsed into their old habits.

The Directorate For Social Mobilisation (commonly referred to as MAMSER after one of its programmes) synthesised the various approaches already attempted and came up with the first wholistic approach to the nation's problems. Hence, the more ambitious approach that has replaced the single theme of previous campaigns with several cleverly interwoven themes. On account of its breathtaking reach, the apparatus for achieving its multifaceted aims is much more elaborate than the media campaign strategy previous attempts adopted.

Social mobilisation can therefore be seen from the perspective of the Political Bureau's definition:

Social Mobilisation must be seen in terms of involving the people in taking part actively and freely in discussions and decisions affecting their general welfare. In other words, social mobilisation and political education should aim at increasing people's level of awareness or cognition of political and other issues so that they can apply their energies positively and participate actively in the social and political life of the country. Social mobilisation and political education programmes should aim at creating a wholly new political culture that will transcend the multitude of negative factors that have hitherto characterised the Nigerian nation (Political Bureau, p. 530).

Thus the machinery set up for achieving its aims and objectives is both a learning process and activity programme. As a learning process, MAMSER has, through workshops, seminars and the establishment of resource panels, sought to tap the immense intellectual resources of the academic and various professional groups. As an activity programme, the 12-point mandate of the directorate has been encapsulated into three closely-related programmes via Mass Mobilisation for Self-Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) concerned with physical act of mobilisation, mass education under which a literate society by 1992 is the goal, political education on which platform a politically aware, conscious and enlightened third republic rests and its special programmes for mobilising the military and the family.

The goals of mass mobilisation for self-reliance, social justice and economic recovery is informed and guided by Nigeria's development objectives of building:

- a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- a great and dynamic economy;
- a just and egalitarian society;
- a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens; and
- a free, democratic society.

In trying to actualise these five directive principles of state, the Directorate came up with some programmes namely: Political Education, Mass Mobilisation (Self-reliance, Social Justice, Economic Recovery and promotion of leadership by example), Mass Literacy and Armed Forces MAMSER programmes. A brief description of these programmes follow, especially as it affects the teeming grassroots people who have benefited immensely from the increased attention the directorate has paid to them.

Mass Mobilisation

The Mass Mobilisation For Social Justice, Self-Reliance and Economic Recovery programme is popularly known as MAMSER. The Mass Mobilisation Department pursues a programme of multi-dimensional

mass awareness campaigns. It has, through seminars, workshops, exhibitions, community theatre, youth programmes, mass rallies and self-reliance programme, like the 'Operation Food First' programme, the promotion of excellence in the public service, the renewed War Against Indiscipline and Promoting Leadership by example, endeavoured to relate to the directorate's different target groups.

On social justice, MAMSER is to serve as the voice of the voiceless and assist those that may not have had easy access to justice on account of poverty or other disabilities. In the past two years MAMSER has been able to fight social injustice side by side with the masses in cases such as wrongful detention and unjustifiable treatment of innocent people. The programme has proved popular with the people at the grassroots and MAMSER has succeeded in bringing hope to many Nigerians who ordinarily would have continued to languish in jail.

Through these programmes, the directorate has evolved a grassroots-oriented mobilisation strategy and conscientised the masses at the grassroots level to stand up firmly in support of social justice. Its campaign for self-reliance, a vital ingredient in our drive towards economic recovery, has painstakingly organised the rural women into viable economic groups. The mobilisation campaign has also seen the re-emergence of co-operative societies where they were extinct, rejuvenation where they were moribund and fresh establishment where such groups were non-existent. The existence of trade groups/co-operative societies will provide the pivot upon which the success of such programmes as the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Better Life for Rural Dwellers (BLFD) and the newly-established People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN) will revolve.

Also important is the directorate's economic recovery programmes such as popularising the National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND), a programme in which the government has invested about 4.1 billion for small-scale industries to thrive in the country. Through the mobilisation efforts of MAMSER, an awareness was created and the NERFUND programme was geared into immediate action to the extent that the co-ordinators felt we over-mobilised the public. Also, the National Conference on Structural Transformation for Self-reliance and Social Justice held in Lagos between 10 and 13 October 1989 is a clear manifestation of the conviction of MAMSER that Nigeria has all it takes to achieve greatness. The conference sought, among other objectives, to make the much-dreaded Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), a way of life for the masses of this nation by moving from successful adjustment to sustained transformation which will ultimately give the people hope.

In this light, some of the fundamental objectives of structural transformation of the Nigerian economy and society can be recast as follows:

- creating a conducive social and technological basis for sustainable development;
- transformation of production structures through agricultural and industrial development;
- facilitating the greatest possible development of agriculture-fed industries so as to ensure massive production of food and industrial raw materials;
- minimising the phenomenon of external dependence and reliance on foreign aid;
- ensuring the fullest possible utilisation of our human and material resources;
- transformation of the consumption pattern to reflect a self-reliant productive structure;
- elimination of mass poverty;
- creating opportunities for useful employment on a scale that will harness the potential of the unemployed.

One can go on recounting the gains of the directorate in mobilising the grassroots people for the evolution of a new social order but suffice it to say that different segments of the social strata have been effectively mobilised in this direction.

The directorate has special programmes for the Armed Forces and security agencies and they have been launched in all the military and security formations nationwide. Today, the manuals designed for this purpose are being used extensively for mobilisation purposes in all the forces. In addition, the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces recently inaugurated the Armed Forces Consultative Assembly (AFCA) to ensure that the disengagement of the military in 1992 is total.

Political Education

The political education programme assumed a systematically phased character from inception because it was recognised that raising the