

information. About 61 percent of Tanzania's population participate in communication-oriented innovation transfers with posters and group leaders acting as supports for the systems. Efforts have also been made to use the local languages as well as integrate social, economic and political characteristics and policies of the country as part of the package.

This type of understanding, awareness and selective adoption consciousness is absent in most Nigeria programmes, particularly those directed at the rural population. The policy-makers have not been able to study and understand the so-called 'common man' because each time they plan, it is the few elites they have in mind. A deliberate attempt has to be made to ensure that adequate and relevant information packages are specifically addressed to this group of people who constitute the economic and production base of our development at the grassroots level. For it is only when this is done that their productivity can be greatly enhanced.

The theatre has also been a veritable channel of communication with grassroots people via community theatre sponsored by the directorate in many areas of the country to get the message of political education, mass education, self-reliance and social justice to the people. Apart from this, efforts have also been made from outright sponsorship of popular drama series on television such as 'At Your Service', 'Basi And Company' and many others in various languages in the states, to the sponsorship of scripts of popular drama series such as *Ojo Ladipo Theatre* (pidgin), the *Masquerade* and *Samaja* (English), among many others. The idea here is to ensure that important messages on Nigeria's socio-political and economic development are subtly passed on to the teeming lovers of tele plays in both the rural areas and the urban centres.

This is what prompted the grassroots-oriented structure of the Directorate for Social Mobilisation, which sees the more than 80 million Nigerians in the rural areas as its primary audience in its social mobilisation programmes. The structure is unique in the sense that the majority of the staffers of the directorate is found in the field — community, district, ward and local government levels. The headquarters at Abuja is a Think-Tank for the organisation while the state directorates only co-ordinate and supervise the activities of the field officers. Thus, it is that there are MAMSER social mobilisation officers (SMOs) in all the Local Government Areas in the country. This structure has greatly facilitated easy grassroots mobilisation since the SMOs interact with the people on a daily basis. This method has resulted in increased awareness and consciousness of the rural population in the past two years.

Constraints of Grassroots Reporting in National Transformation

Grassroots economic activity reporting is inundated with certain

constraints and problems. Some of these problems include press development, harsh economic situation, high rate of illiteracy, inappropriate language of communication and lack of mobilisation. Majority of the mass media (electronic and print) in Nigeria are government-owned. The electronic media is an exclusive preserve of Federal and State Governments, while some degree of private ownership has been allowed in the print media. Without going into the controversy of the desirability of who owns the media, it is an established fact that the Nigerian mass media — radio, television, newspapers, newsmagazines — are heavily urban-biased. They rarely get out of the capital cities and their visits to the local government headquarters or some villages are predicated on when the governor, minister or commissioner pays a flying visit. Yet when the journalists talk or write about the rural people and their lives, they are so 'authoritative' whereas they have limited information about them. This is unfortunate and it has led to persistent faulty assessment of development programmes taking place there and a negatively imposed image. Undoubtedly, the ownership structure of the media by government has greatly influenced the tilt of news to only government officials. As for the print media where many private individuals have invested, the editorial policy has favoured the political ambition and business interests of the proprietors. It is therefore quite difficult for the toiling millions of Nigerians in the rural areas to have access to needed information relevant to their lives. It follows that they are cut off from contributing to the decision-making processes which explains their increased marginalisation and disadvantaged position.

In a study conducted by Abubakar (1987) on the impact of media reporting on rural development, it was discovered that less than six percent of the news coverage in both the print and electronic media was on rural activities, while about 57.5 percent was on happenings in the cities. Even then, the city news was mostly in connection with what government officials are saying or doing. The samples of the reports taken during the seven-day research period also confirm a one-way flow of information which predominantly favours urban areas from where all news flows to rural areas. News rarely originates from the rural areas. It is therefore not surprising that when views are sought via VOX POPS or any other means from the supposed 'masses', they are merely ill-digested and contrived opinions of the journalists who in fact know little about the condition of the people.

This indeed is the crux of the matter and the best approach to solving this seemingly intractable imbalance in rural communication deserves urgent attention. We have identified media ownership/editorial policy, specialised training in reporting, urban bias development, high illiteracy rate, inappropriate language of communication and lack of mobilisation

as major sources of concern in solving these problems. In discussing these problems, it is hoped that a few suggestions would emanate. An effective two-way communication flow and the use of credible and effective channels of communication for the ruralites would, however, be the ultimate goal of the discussions.

Media Ownership

Government is still the largest shareholder in the news industry in the country, particularly the electronic media where its ownership is 100 percent. In spite of this, it is increasingly becoming necessary that the various media houses should begin to realise that their diverse audiences are more important than the financiers. Therefore, their editorial policies should radically respond to the people's need because news can only be relevant to the extent that they qualitatively relate to the lives of the people. If it is true that 80 percent of Nigerians live in the rural areas, they are the source of the collective wealth available to the nation and should be given adequate attention in news coverage from their own perspective. This is the only way the current trend of a privatised, commercialised and deregulated economy can become more meaningful to the majority of Nigerians. Increasingly, our media managers should ensure that equal attention is paid to rural information both in terms of news gathering and dissemination such that when news of their activities is relayed, they too can understand and appreciate what is being said. For example, Nigeria is yet to have rural-oriented newspapers because the existing ones are packed just like the urban-directed newspapers. A real rural newspaper may require using bolder prints, extensive use of simple illustrations, many pictures and fewer pages to ensure that those that can 'read' are encouraged and those that cannot will still be able to make some sense of the pictures as well as the illustrations.

As for the electronic media, how much broadcast time is really directed to the rural audience and what are their contents? How are they packaged? Any attempt to answer these questions will show clearly that limited time is used for rural-oriented broadcast and the packaging has little or no common indices with which they can identify most times. There is need for radio and television broadcast planners to find ways and means of designing and packaging specific programmes for the rural people with a large dose of participation by members of this crucial target group to ensure empathy and generate sufficient support among them.

Specialised Training for Reporters

Journalism has come of age in Nigeria and in the past four years attempts have been made in both the print and electronic media to train

reporters along specialised lines such that there are now political, energy, economy, education, health, sports and several other designated correspondents. Although one may not advocate for a rural news desk or correspondents, it is imperative that the various desks created so far have their rural components. It is this vital source of information that the various correspondents have to explore such that the high percentage of urban news can be drastically reduced to less than 40 percent. This should not be difficult provided the editorial policies of the respective media organisations recognise this lapse and are willing to make up for it. A substantial percentage of rural Nigerians have limited contact with sophistication of the cities and the monetary system in their daily existence. There are few social amenities, educational and health facilities are inadequate, electricity and water are luxuries and monetary instruments for exchange of services are rare happenings. Yet the Nigerian press of the '90s must seek out these people, dialogue with them and fight their cause for a better tomorrow because the rural economy constitutes the greater part of the gross domestic product on which we all depend.

Urban Biased Development

Uneven development is a major characteristic of most developing nations of the world. Although a nation's wealth is largely generated from the rural areas, rarely does this wealth find its way back, but is spent on several money-gobbling projects in the cities. Thus, the major cities become overpopulated, congested with skybound houses, such that basic facilities needed for good living like water, light, transportation, housing and other public utilities become grossly inadequate in spite of the huge sums of money expended. In many instances, some of the rural people have migrated in large numbers to the cities thereby compounding the problems. It is this same pattern of one-sided development in virtually all spheres that has affected the mass media to the extent that whatever is not happening in the cities rarely gets reported. In redressing this imbalance, an integrated approach to rural development is needed such that every community is given the minimum basic needs of life to make rapid economic growth possible. If this is done, then the chances of the media covering these areas would be greatly enhanced.

Other areas of grassroots development needing attention include the high illiteracy rate and inappropriate language of communication. These two problems are complementary because it is precisely the high rate of illiteracy that has made the language of communication (mainly English) in the various media rather too academic and restrictive to only a small percentage of the entire population. If one does not belong to the elite

group, it is difficult to understand and follow most television and radio programmes. Only the few vernacular programmes can be said to be directed to the rural people even though the packaging and content are sometimes beyond the understanding of the ordinary folks in the village. This only means that the various electronic media organisations still have a lot to do in packaging different programmes such that it would fit into the particular audience situation intended.

As for our newspapers and newsmagazines, there is no doubt that they are strictly for the elite. If any average primary or secondary school student cannot make any sense out of it, then it is not possible that they can help their parents out in trying to decipher the contents. The print media have an uphill task in ensuring that the majority of the people presently cut off in the rural areas from vital news that can radically improve their economic lives gets the right type of community newspapers they can read, understand and empathise with in terms of content, layout and general presentation. Although the Directorate for Social Mobilisation in conjunction with other literacy agencies are carrying out programmes that would substantially reduce illiteracy, the media organisations should in the interim seek ways of communicating with the vast majority of our people that toil daily to provide the nation's wealth.

Mobilisation Constraints

Like any other programme, MAMSER is faced with certain problems some of which were particularly serious and glaring at its inception. The directorate considered these problems as great challenges of mobilisation. In tackling some of the problems it did not lay exclusive claim to wisdom; instead, it has continued to identify and utilise patriotic and hardworking Nigerians of different professional callings as resource persons for specific programmes of the directorate at national, state and local government levels. Since its inception, MAMSER has identified some problems in the course of the mobilisation crusade. These include:

- (a) Apathy, cynicism and even opposition by the elite. Since the objective of MAMSER is to establish a new social order that will ensure a free, just and democratic society, it is obvious that those who gain from the existing order will naturally remain determined to maintain the *status quo*. Any attempt, therefore, to raise the consciousness of the people, particularly as it relates to their constitutional rights, is easily seen as a threat which must be met with stiff resistance.
- (b) MAMSER is fighting against a multitude of negative attitudes which have become institutionalised. Corruption, electoral and census malpractices, laziness, lack of patriotism, etc., have taken over and eaten deep into the fabric of our national life. It will take

time before these negative attitudes can be adequately tackled.

- (c) Serious lack of patience by most Nigerians. There is a strong tendency to look for quick results; and if such quick results are not forthcoming within a few months, people tend to write off such programmes, however laudable. Yet it takes time for any programme of social change to bear fruits.
- (d) The vast and diverse nature of Nigeria created serious logistic problems for MAMSER.
- (e) The rather difficult economic challenges facing the nation has made mobilisation much more difficult, although highly relevant and necessary.
- (f) There are also difficulties with adequate funding in view of several competing programmes and projects.

Conclusion

These problems notwithstanding, MAMSER was set up to specifically solve fundamental problems obstructing our development process and has resolved to struggle on with the vital tasks of social mobilisation and political education. The mass media are powerful and potent instruments for national development. Nigeria in its present depressed economic state needs a virile and vibrant development-oriented press. However, one gets worried with the amount of negative reporting that goes on in all the media organs in the country as if to say Nigerians are a special breed of people that are irredeemable and doomed to fail in all things. This is, indeed, unfortunate for Nigeria is certainly a country that has all the potentialities of becoming one of the front runners in world affairs in the future.

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