

ENUGU FORUM POLICY PAPER 5

DEBATING POLICY OPTIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

COMMUNICATING POLICY REFORMS: BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT, THE PRESS* AND THE PEOPLE



AFRICAN INSTITUTE FOR APPLIED ECONOMICS

ENUGU FORUM POLICY PAPER 5

DEBATING POLICY OPTIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**COMMUNICATING POLICY REFORMS:
— BETWEEN —
THE GOVERNMENT, THE PRESS* AND THE PEOPLE**



AFRICAN INSTITUTE FOR APPLIED ECONOMICS

ENUGU FORUM POLICY PAPER 5

Series Theme

DEBATING AND PROPOSING POLICY OPTIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Topic:

COMMUNICATING POLICY REFORMS: ————— BETWEEN ————— THE GOVERNMENT, THE PRESS* AND THE PEOPLE

Presenter:

1. Professor Chinyere Stella Okunna

*Head of Mass Communication,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University
Awka, Anambra State*

2. Dr. Edith Nwanguma,

*Chairperson Nigeria Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ),
Enugu State and Editor News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)*

3. Kevin Ejiofor

*Director General
Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria
Abuja*



AFRICAN INSTITUTE FOR APPLIED ECONOMICS

128 Park Avenue, GRA, P.O. Box 2147 Enugu, NIGERIA
Tel: +234 (042) 256644, 256035, 300096. Fax: 256035
E-mail: aiaeinfo@aiae-nigeria.org, aiae@infoweb.com.ng www.aiae-nigeria.org

PUBLISHED BY AFRICAN INSTITUTE FOR APPLIED ECONOMICS

FIRST PUBLISHED 2005

© African Institute for Applied Economics

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

ABOUT ENUGU FORUM

INTRODUCTION

Opening new spaces for domestic policy dialogue is one of the most important potential gains of democratic governance. Democratic space creates public policy arena in which government can be engaged by private sector and civil society on what it is doing or not doing, and hence be pressured to perform. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, there has been an upsurge of private sector and civil society engagement with governments on economic policy and development issues. But, the upsurge of civic advocacy on economic and development issues has not been matched with commensurate improvements in the quality of debates on policy alternatives and roadmaps for national development.

ENUGU FORUM is intended to provide a civic arena for proposing and debating policy alternatives and roadmaps towards social, economic and political progress of the country. It is hoped that the FORUM will foster interaction between government and non-state actors towards good governance, accountability and participatory democracy.

IDENTITY AND MISSION

Enugu Forum is a civic platform devoted to intellectual conversation and of policy issues affecting the growth and development of the country. It was founded in 2001 to promote informed and credible avenues of stakeholder dialogue and policy advocacy. It seeks to improve the policy process through high quality debate and non-partisan discourse of alternative solutions to contemporary development questions.

The Forum deploys both intellectual and empirical insight to nurture a shared understanding and objective scrutiny of policy issues on social, economic and political development of the country.

ACTIVITIES

Enugu Forum's activities take several forms:

- ◆ Public Lectures
- ◆ Seminars
- ◆ Workshops
- ◆ Conferences
- ◆ Roundtables

The activities bring together diverse stakeholders including government officials, private sector operators, independent think-pots and civil society to exchange and constructively critique perspectives and experiences on critical policy imperatives. Attendance is by formal invitation.

OUTPUTS

The outputs of the Forum's activities take the form of communiqué outlining key outcomes of discussions, conclusions and recommendations. The presentations and proceedings are further developed into Occasional Papers, Working Papers or Policy Briefs widely circulated to inform, sensitise and enlighten stakeholders.

STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATION

Enugu Forum is structured into a Steering Committee, a Coordinating Committee and the General Members. The Steering Committee governs the Forum through guides and policies agreed in consultation with the General Members. The Coordinating Committee executes the activities and programmes.

MEMBERSHIP

There are two classes of membership: individual and corporate. The Forums' activities are open and can be attended by all interested persons but formal invitations are issued to members and designated guests only. To be a member, one needs to register in the appropriate category. Registration can be done during the Forum's events, or at the Host Organization - *African Institute for Applied Economics, Enugu*.

SPONSORSHIP

Ownership of the Forum resides in the members. It is run on the goodwill contributions from corporate bodies and individuals. Sponsorship includes provision of venue, refreshments, logistics, and facilitation of Guest Speakers and Resource Persons.

HOST INSTITUTION

The Enugu Forum is hosted by the African Institute for Applied Economics (AIAE) Enugu. AIAE is a non-governmental, not-for-profit and independent organization devoted to economic policy research for the purpose of promoting evidence-based decision making. It is located at 128 Park Avenue, GRA, Enugu, Phone: (042) 256644, 256035, 300096; Fax: (042) 256035. E-mail: aiaeinfo@aiae-nigeria.org, aiae@infoweb.com.ng; <http://www.aiae-nigeria.org>

ENUGU FORUM POLICY PAPERS

Enugu Forum Policy Paper Series publishes the proceedings and outcomes of workshops, conferences, seminars or public lectures held by the Enugu Forum. The Series provides documentation of the topical presentations, debate, comments and perhaps consensus at the Forum.

It is intended to disseminate the Forum's intellectual discourse to a wider audience. The essence is to stimulate broader policy debate and promote multi-perspective dialogue on policy options.

Enugu Forum Policy Papers constitute an advocacy instrument to canvass alternative development solutions and policy roadmaps, for the overall purpose of enriching the policy discourse in the country. The Series also draws attention of government, private sector and civil society to salient dimensions of contemporary development challenges in Nigeria.

Series Editors:

Eboh, Eric Chiedum

Ukeje, Stanley

Ibe, Chidiebere

Ikpo, Kobi P.

COMMUNICATING POLICY REFORMS: BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT, THE PRESS* AND THE PEOPLE

By
Professor Chinyere Stella Okunna
*Head of Mass Communication,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka,
Anambra State*

A Presentation at the Enugu Forum, organized by African Institute for Applied Economics, on October 19, 2004

▣ ATTEMPTING A DEFINITION

I would like to start this presentation with a look at the meaning of the key concept in the topic that I have been assigned to speak on this afternoon.

The term 'public policy' is usually used to describe a wide range of different activities of the government geared towards defining objectives, setting priorities, articulating plans, taking decisions and enforcing rules etc (Tobi, 2004). Consider the following utterances:

- ◆ "Public policy is purposive or goal-oriented action rather than random or choice behaviour. ... It involves some forms of government action to affect a particular problem" (Anderson, 1975).
- ◆ "Public policy is a complex and ongoing process which implies that there is an articulated and clearly defined public issue requiring attention on a continuous basis through the commitment of substantial public sector resources and efforts" (Abbusalam, 1998).
- ◆ "Public policy is a purposive cause of action followed by an actor or set of actors dealing with problem or matter of concern. ... policies are formulated and implemented with the specific objective of effecting desired changes in some aspects of human life activities" (Tukur, 1998).
- ◆ "Public policies are shaped and determined by social contexts which are socially constructed. ... there is a complex relationship between societal problems and public policies. ... they evolve over time as participants interact, thus emerging out of series of negotiated settlements" (Tobi, 2004).

▣ POLICY REFORMS, DEMOCRACY AND THE PEOPLE

What emerges from all these definitions is the fact that policy making is dynamic and constantly on the move, so to say. Because public policies are usually formulated and implemented to address specific societal issues or problems requiring attention, policies inevitably change to reflect the dynamism of the social context and issues/problems this context is constantly throwing up.

This scenario brings into sharp focus the need for policy reforms, particularly in a democracy which, as "the government that is accountable to the people" (Lawal, 2004), is expected to constantly formulate and implement policies that will achieve the fullest development of the citizens whose mandate or consent is required to keep a democratically elected government in power. Such

policies require constant review and reform to ensure that government is adequately addressing the problems of the polity.

'Democracy' is a concept that has apparently eluded precise definition. As Lawal (2004) correctly says, "Literature is replete with many definitions and meanings of the concept of 'democracy'." **Nevertheless, no matter how democracy is defined, it is generally agreed that there are definite attributes of a democratic society. Sewant (2000) refers to these as the "three essential requisites of democracy" which he identifies as:

- ◆ a well informed citizenry
- ◆ participation of the citizens in the day-to-day governance of the society
- ◆ accountability to the citizens of those who exercise power on their behalf

Deriving from the three essential requisites, and more or less synonymous with them, are the citizens' three-fold functions in democracy. According to Sewant, these are:

- ◆ to participate in the day-to-day affairs of the society
- ◆ to take informed decisions
- ◆ to keep a check on the authorities who rule on their behalf

In many respects, these essential requisites and citizens' functions revolve around policy formulation, implementation and reforms, which should be at the very foundation of democracy.

☐ COMMUNICATING POLICY REFORMS: THE ROLE OF THE PRESS

Another fundamental requisite of democratic governance is that it should guarantee freedom of expression and of the press. The citizens are the foundation of any democracy and need to perform their functions to make democracy work. These functions cannot be performed in any modern society without the press (media) effectively playing their role. This is the major reason why the role of the media in a democracy is indispensable and why a democracy should guarantee freedom of the press. In fact, so fundamental is the media's role in democracy that the media have been glowingly described as "the very oxygen of democracy" (Starrett, 1999).

Probably the most basic function that the media must perform in democracy is the provision of full and truthful information. According to Pini Jason (2000), one of the core roles that are articulated for the mass media in a democracy is "To convey information to the people with a view to letting them know how the mandate they gave their representatives is being discharged." In exercising this mandate, policy formulation and implementation are fundamental activities of the government. Consequently, making the polity knowledgeable about government policies and policy reforms is part of what the press must do as information brokers in a democracy.

It is generally agreed that the citizens cannot perform any of their functions in a democracy without access to full and truthful information. It is also generally agreed that the media are the only instruments that can provide this type of information in the modern world. Sewant (2000) makes these points when he says:

... none of the functions which the citizens have to perform in democracy can be performed by them in the absence of full and truthful information. Who can furnish such information to the people at large, constantly and regularly, except a mass communicator like the media? ... Media, whether print or electronic, is (sic) thus the only institution which can keep people as well as those in authority, informed on all matters and at all times of the

day. Consequently, it is the media which enables the people to perform their three-fold function in democracy.

Democracy functions best when the people are knowledgeable about government policies that have been formulated for their benefit, and can take action to ensure that these policies are implemented and reformed when the need arises. The need for the media to provide the quantity and quality of information needed guarantee this situation can be summarized as follows:

- ◆ Without adequate and accurate information, the citizens will be unable to understand the day-to-day functioning of the government (which revolves around policy making), and therefore will be unable to participate in governance.
- ◆ Unless citizens have adequate and accurate information on all the issues and problems confronting them in society, and the policies formulated by government to address these, they cannot take enlightened decisions on such issues and problems.
- ◆ In the absence of full and truthful information, the citizens cannot hold those in authority responsible for their omissions or commissions with respect to policy implementation and reforms.

▣ CONSTRAINTS ON THE PRESS IN COMMUNICATING POLICY REFORMS

A number of factors can constrain the press in the discharge of its onerous responsibility to make democracy work, especially by effectively communicating policy reforms. A few of these will now be quickly looked at in the Nigeria context.

■ Lack of Press Freedom and Editorial Independence

This is one of the greatest constraints on the media in the performance of their role in a fledgling democracy like ours. One cardinal value cherished by journalists everywhere has to do with the need for the news content of the media to be the responsibility of professional journalists. Thus, although media owners should exercise their constitutional right to own, establish and operate mass media without interference, they should accept that the content of news is one which a professional journalist must decide (Momoh, 2000).

Excessive control of the media and media content by media owners, particularly state governments, greatly undermines the credibility of the media, and denies journalists their rights to function as true professionals. In this regard, many Nigerians have had cause to complain that "the media are the defenders of the status quo ... they also make prominent certain issues thus giving them priority, which may be undue. Examples of topics given such prominence are: First Lady Syndrome, Governors and their deputies ..." (Esan, 2000).

It is common knowledge that most government-owned media in Nigeria cannot perform the crucial function of serving as society's watchdogs concerning government's errors of omission and commission in policy making because they lack the courage to 'bite the hand that feeds them', so to say. The common scenario is for most of such media to resort to sycophancy. Sycophancy is excessive praise which is usually largely undeserved. This unethical conduct places the media in double jeopardy vis-à-vis their functions in a democracy: they can neither provide the truthful information needed by the citizens nor can they serve as watchdogs to make government implement meaningful policies and be accountable to the citizens. Okunna (2003) explains this double calamity for democracy. In the area of sycophancy and the media's watchdog role, she says:

[One] negative influence of sycophancy is that it leads to dereliction of duty on the part of the recipient of the false praise. When people in authority are flattered by the same institution (the press) whose duty it is to

objectively appraise the performance of such people, they are deceived by such flattery and fail to realize that they are not discharging their duties as required by the positions of authority they occupy. Even when they realize that they are not doing well, they are content to hide behind the misinformation by the press, knowing that the public may be none the wiser to their misdeeds.

Also writing about sycophancy and the responsibility of the press to provide accurate information to the citizens, Okunna says:

Generally, sycophancy denies the public the correct information which it is the duty of the journalist to give them. This denial occurs because the sycophant journalist could twist facts, falsify information, or indulge in sensationalism to promote the interest of the person being flattered. As the game of praise singing goes on, the journalist fails to do the job that needs to be done, that is, catering for the diverse informational and communication needs of the public in a conscientious and responsible manner a failure which is a betrayal of the trust which the public places on the press to champion public interest.

■ Inadequate Preparation for the Job

The mass media can effectively perform their role in democracy only if true professionals operate them. A professional is one who has been well equipped for his/her work, through specialized educational preparation and the acquisition of a distinct body of knowledge. In contemporary democratic Nigeria, there is the need for all journalists to acquire, through formal journalism education in proper schools of mass communication, the necessary knowledge and skills which they require to function as true professionals. The Nigerian Press Council Decree 85 has prescribed the minimum standards that must be attained before someone could become a journalist in the country. The education content of this prescription should be fully enforced.

In addition, it should be ensured that journalism training schools are equipped in the areas of staffing and facilities to impart high quality knowledge to their students. This requires stringent quality control in terms of who teaches, what is taught, where it is taught, how it is taught, with what it is taught etc. Indeed, Pini Jason (2000) is right when he says, "the responsibilities of journalists is (sic) an enormous one. Those who inform must be well informed themselves." Constant re-training through workshops and seminars should also be an integral part of the education of journalists.

■ Absence of an Enabling Environment

The environment within which the press functions in Nigeria is often not conducive to the effective performance of the journalistic duties necessary for democracy to thrive. Lack of even basic equipment and poor or completely absent remunerations for journalists are no incentives for professionalism and the ethical conduct needed for effective communication. There is an urgent need for owners of the media, especially governments, to strengthen the capacity of both the media and the professionals who work in them. Capacity building in this regard should include the provision of up-to-date equipment and adequate remunerations as and when due. A situation in which even Federal Government media establishments lack the capacity to make their presence felt in their areas of operation, is indeed sad for democracy. The relatively new NTAwka is a case in point.

Virtually cut off from its constituency by absence of an access road and handicapped by lack of the basic equipment for its trade, the station desperately needs to be empowered by all stakeholders at state and national levels to face the challenges of its role in our democracy. The current situation in which the station's signals cannot reach the commercial cities of Onitsha and Nnewi, because of low transmitter capacity, is indeed pathetic. How on earth can it generate the much-needed revenue if its 'revenue centres' are beyond its reach?

■ Limited Access to Media at the Grassroots

Government policy needs to make provision for a wider variety of voices to ensure that the quantity of information required for the effective functioning of a democracy is made available to all citizens - irrespective of place of abode. Community media, especially community radio stations, should be established, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. There is no harm in empowering some departments of mass communication or 'schools of journalism' in universities and polytechnics to serve as the nuclei of some of such outfits, by assisting them to construct well-equipped radio studios and granting them licences for community broadcasting.

■ Over-Commercialization of the Media

The news media, like virtually everything in capitalism, are profit oriented. This is what is generally referred to as "news in the age of money". The media's responsibility to provide quality information to make democracy work is often constrained by the need for the media to also make profit as business concerns. As Johnson points out, "balancing the cost of high quality journalism against corporate profits is one of the significant challenges in ... journalism today" (Johnson, 2001). This is an 'approach approach conflict'; the media must be able to strike the right balance between these extremes for it to be able to play its role in a democracy.

The ongoing commercialization of the news media in Nigeria has been seen in many quarters as a great threat to democracy and communication scholars and other stakeholders have continued to warn against the development. More than a decade and half ago, Sobowale (1988) raised an alarm over the negative impact that the commercialization of Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) could have on national development. As he said:

...a trend that some communication scholars and experts consider "dangerous" has emerged in the commercialization of news by the Nigerian Television Authority. If this trend is not checked, it may mean that only those who could pay for their activities, no matter how unimportant or irrelevant these may be, would receive coverage by the NTA, with the exception of the Government which owns it. The consequences of such a situation are better imagined than described.

More recently, Popoola (2004) condemned the ongoing revenue drive by the broadcast media in Nigeria, seeing it as "shying away from their [media's] primary responsibilities of educating, informing and enlightening the citizenry" and describing the commercialization of news as a violation of the fundamental rights of the people to express their opinion and receive the right type of information.

■ Adopting a Multi-Media Approach

The press is powerful, no doubt, but in a society like Nigeria where a good number of factors still prevent direct exposure to the mass media by very many Nigerian, there is the need to use the press in conjunction with other channels of communication which are genuinely accessible to the people. Research into media use patterns in the country shows that most Nigerians still rely on interpersonal traditional media as sources of information. Such media should be fully utilized, along with the press in a multi-media/channel approach, for the effective communication of policy reforms, particularly at the grassroots where lack of access to the mass media is severe.

☐ CONCLUSION

The role of the press in a democracy, especially in terms of policy implementation and reforms, is truly indispensable. Particularly for a fledgling democracy like ours in Nigeria, all hands should be on deck to empower the media and media professionals to effectively perform this role.

NOTES

* 'Press' will be used interchangeably with 'media' in this presentation; both words are therefore taken as synonymous.

** Parts of this and subsequent sections have been adapted from my presentation "Role of Media in a Democracy", solicited paper presented at the 'Premier Public Discourse' organized by NTA Awka, on Thursday 30th September 2004, in Awka

REFERENCES

- Abbusalam, I. (1998). "Public Policy: Concept, Approaches and Processes". In I.N. Obasi and N. Yaqub (eds.) *Local Government Policy Making and Execution in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Sam Bookman Publishers.
- Anderson, J. (1975). *Public Policy Making*. New York: Praeger Publishing Coy.
- Esan, Yinka (2000). "Democracy: What Paradigm for the Media?" In Lanre Arogundade and Bose Eitokpah (eds.), *Media in a Democracy*. Lagos: International Press Centre and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- Jason, Pini (2000), "Setting the Democratic Agenda". Ibid
- Johnson, Nicholas (2001). "Defining the Land of the Fourth Estate". In *Media and Ethics*. Lagos: Whitney Young Information Resource Center (United States Consulate).
- Lawal, Gbenga (2004). "Democratic Prospects and Problems in Nigeria". *International Review of Politics and Development*, Vol. 2, No. 1.
- Momoh, Tony (2000). "The Press and Democratic Transformation, an Overview". In Arogundade and Eitokpah, op cit.
- Okunna, Chinyere Stella (2003). *Ethics of Mass Communication* (2nd Edition). Enugu: New Generation Publishers.
- Popoola, I.S. (2004). "Broadcast Media and the New Revenue Generation Drive: A Threat to Human Rights". *International Journal of Communication*. Nsukka: University of Nigeria.
- Sewant, P.B. (2000). "Media and Democracy: A Global View". In *Media and Democracy*. Abuja: The Nigerian Press Council.
- Sobowale, Idowu (1988). "Role of National Communication Policy and Communication Systems in Developmental Process in Nigeria". In Ralph Akinfeleye (ed.), *Contemporary Issues in Mass Media for Development and National Security*. Lagos: Unimedia Publications.
- Starrett, Faustina (1999). In *Formation of Media for the 21st Century*. Caux, Switzerland: International Communications Forum.
- Tobi, Ariyo A. (2004). "Public Policies on Corruption in Nigeria". *International Review of Politics and Development*, Vol. 2, No. 1.
- Tukur, N. (1998). "Social Process and Policy Making in Local Government". In I.N. Obasi and N. Yaqub (eds.) *Local Government Policy Making and Execution in Nigeria*, op cit.

“COMMUNICATING POLICY REFORMS: BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT, PRESS AND THE PEOPLE”

Dr. Edith Nwanguma,

Chairperson Nigeria Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ), Enugu State

And Editor News Agency of Nigeria (NAN)

Presented at Enugu Forum, October 2004

Introduction

According to the Hamlyn World Encyclopedic Dictionary; Policy means a definite course of action adopted as expedient or from other considerations. It is also a course or line of action adopted and pursued by government, ruler, political part or the like. The same dictionary defines Reform as the improvement or amendment of what is wrong or corrupt. This reform can be social economic, educational, or health wise.

On the other hand, government is the authoritative direction and restraint exercised over the actions of men in communities, societies and states. Furthermore, the press is an establishment for printing books, etcetera. It is also a process or art of printing. The people are a whole body of persons constituting a community and communication is an act or fact of transmission, imparting or change of thoughts, opinion, or information by writing, speech or signs.

What then is “media”? It is plural of “medium”, which also refers to print size of paper just as the press. I will then use the media and the press interchangeably in this paper. It was an American President who said once that if he had to choose between having a government without press and having press without government, he would choose the later. The electronic are radio and television with different audience. The Television which has added advantage of visual to audio has limited audience and reach due to high cost of purchase and electronic power supply.

We do know to what extent urban dwellers grapple with epileptic electricity power supply vis-à-vis scanty electrification of rural areas. (But don't worry, the bills keep coming, sometimes, even higher during the period of power outage). However, the radio compensates as it is cheaper to buy and can be used in the remotest rural areas, with battery. The Print media include newspapers, magazines, newsletters, house magazines for corporate organizations for the sport world, journals etc. Our traditional town criers are also handy for the traditional rulers to use although many of them are absentee royal fathers, living outside their domains, paying more allegiance to their contracts and other businesses instead of playing their traditional roles as royal fathers. (I hope they are getting used to the “Due Process” and the rest of the reform packages by the government. The information technology which links one to the information highway is yet to be mastered by many in Nigeria.

Communication is used as tool or megaphone to enable governments and leaders speak louder for the people to hear and accept reforms. It is believed that policy reforms are likely to succeed when they are understood and supported by the people affected by them. Governments most times depend on the press or media to persuade the public on the benefits of such reforms. It also trusts that the multi-media sudden swift involving the press, advertising agencies, public relation practitioners, propaganda machines and political campaigns are all there is to gain support for government policies. In recent times the federal government has co-opted the powerful voices of the Royal Fathers and Church Leaders to gain support for reforms. Governments at all levels realizing the power of the press establish ministries and units to communicate their policies to the people. The other arms of government that is the legislature and the judiciary are not left out both at the federal state and rural level.

Government and the People

The press stands between the government and the people playing the role of the watchdog, informing, educating and entertaining. The government is supposed to be there to meet the needs of the people that have put the political leaders in power. This connotes some form of partnership between government and the people when a policy is formed or reformed to give the people a sense of belonging.

But it is pertinent to ask here whether government involves the people sufficiently in policymaking or in reforming it and at what stage. Investigations have revealed that the people are not aware of reforms at the early stages. It is only after the policy has been put in place and is being implemented that people start feeling the negative impact and their initial reaction is resistance. The current increase in petroleum product prices is being resisted because the subsidy is being removed and the people are being asked to pay more to buy the product when they were not prepared for this change.

Behavior change communication is the process of educating, persuading, and disseminating information to the people in a way that will influence their behavioral pattern and enable them take actions that will eventually lift up their status. Behavior change is therefore implicit in policy reform, as it will help the people to switch to a new attitude, which is at variance with the old ways of doing things.

Policy reform involves change and no change can take place unless the attitude of the people changes. Communicating such policy reform should focus on the needs of the beneficiaries and efforts to understand and find means to overcome the hurdles that prevent reforms from succeeding. For purposes of accepting reforms communication goes beyond disseminating information. It is rather used as a powerful tool to tap the perceptions, concerns and motivation of the people. Communication in these circumstances spill over from traditional communication practitioners or specialists and becomes part of the process of designing and implementing reforms.

Government should therefore invest in strategic communication by involving consultants, specialists and stakeholders to ensure the success of the reform. For reforms to succeed, media practitioners are persuaded to produce balanced coverage of the issues, leaders of pressure groups should be asked to participate in consultations regarding the reform as NLC has been drawn into the committee set up by Federal Government, to cushion the effect of fuel price increase. The people should also be motivated to engage in constructive dialogue there should also be messages to tell the people what the reform holds for them. Some of the policy reforms put in place by President Obasanjo since re-emergence of Democracy in 1999, include the vexing unending increase in the prices of petroleum products, the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) NEPAD, and the Due Process.

Conclusion

We have established that communication is critical for successful implementation of policy reforms. It has also been established that although the media is there for government to employ to change the behavior of the people in order to accept and make reforms successful, government should invest insufficiently in strategic communication. Going by hindsight, the people do not have enough confidence and trust in the government or that the reforms will benefit them. The people do not believe that the benefit of the reforms is for them but that this is another avenue for unscrupulous government officials and politicians to use as avenue to loot and plunder public investment and thereby transfer state wealth to a few individuals. Government should therefore be transparent and show the people that the reform will genuinely benefit the people. They should always involve the citizenry early in policy formation or reformation. This will make the job of communicating reforms easier for media practitioners and for consensus building and overall development of the nation.

COMMUNICATING POLICY REFORMS BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT, THE PRESS & THE PEOPLE

By
KEVIN EJIOR

This paper will be organized into two broad outlines. Outline 1 will focus on the theme and a variant of it (government information management), the context of the discourse and explore definitions of concepts associated with the theme. Furthermore, this outline will consider information in government business under which will be explored 'the 'people' question' the 'hide it' and the 'tell them' traditions.

The second outline, outline 2, will deal with two issues: Who owns information? and models of communication.

At the end recommendations will be made and conclusions drawn.

THEME AND CONTEXT

The theme or topic could well have been "the government information management in a time of reforms, the role of the press". Reform may be regarded as change; quick, inconvenient, and expensive change. As a result of the inconvenience associated with change, it is common that there is resistance to change.

The on-going reforms are facing apparent general resistance. This is not our first experience with reforms. Past reform activities are evidenced in the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), the Political Bureau Report, and the Privatisation and Deregulation process.

Since reform in public policy has some history, the questions I ask are; why am I/is Radio Nigeria put on this podium? Am I/ is Radio Nigeria on trial? What is the goal: an evaluation/report card? To answer these and other questions, I will like to define some concepts which are associated with the theme.

Information: The dictionary gives the meanings as intelligence given and knowledge. Janet Wheately defined it as the vital force of all living systems, because it is reasoned that without new information any system will die. Personally, I regard information as the art and effort of deploying resources to "best ends".

Management: The dictionary meanings are: manner of directing or of using anything; skillful treatment. According to Tony Proctor, it is the task of planning, organising and controlling any organisation or group of people (to meet overall goals).

Government Information Management: This is the art and science of deploying (new) things worth knowing to best ends as an effective tool (resource) in the process of governance. According to Okonkwo (1980) "the function of the ministries (of information) may be likened to that of a public relations department in a *powerfully big but unpopular* commercial enterprise anxious to create, nurture and sustain a favourable image"

Using these concepts we can go downstream to consider the business of (government) informing the consumers of reform, the people, about things.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND THE PEOPLE:

There are two models that may be applied to managing information regarding reforms, to the people. One is the *Public Information* model which aims to:

- look good at all cost;
- have spin doctors manage what has to be said or done;
- dominate the environment; and
- low ethical context

Another model is the *Two-way Symmetrical* model. This may be termed 'the ethical excellence' model, because it:

- works *with*, not *at* the receivers of information
- obtains buy-in for more meaningful participation by the people
- enlightens, leads and enriches society

Whatever the model, government business requires that the people be informed or engaged in the things that affect their everyday life. How it is done depends on the policy, attitude and practice in operation, and the perspectives that are dominant.

The notable perspectives are

- the culture ; and
- the colonial heritage

The colonial heritage is heavily coloured by the supplanting elite mentality.

There are the 'hide it' and 'we know' policies in government information business. The 'hide it' is (un) written policy within and without government business governed by the attitude that exposure endanger effective government action.

On the other hand, the 'we know' attitude, which is most common comes from the colonial heritage and manifests lack of respect for the people. It is the practice, under this attitude to 'foist' information on the people and cynical manipulation is obvious.

In the light of the above, what should be the focus in information management in government business? Power or Service? A bit of both is always involved. Our concern should be the appropriate mix and whose best interest is served by the policy.

When government information machinery is dominated by titles, awards, epithets and solidarity visits to government officials, we may have difficulty evaluating the effectiveness of reform communication. But will more certainty in the message change things?

Let us examine the depiction of the government and the people in this interaction. Government is supposed to have the bigger picture, clearer perception of priorities and represent a balance of interests. Nevertheless, it has its own survival imperatives to take care of, using the information system at its control. Thus the big canvass of government operation takes place within the macro environment of security imperatives.

With regard to the people, we want to know if they 'own' things worth knowing. Such things may be views/opinions/right to information/consultation. If they have, does government care to uphold such right or seek their views? How much government cares is an important index that should be determined accurately. This measure is important when we remember that government is powerfully big but unpopular (Okonkwo).

The options are information or communication management. In my view, the difference between them is *Respect*.

RESPECT AND GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Self respect in our cultural context translates to being honourable. But it is now observed that impunity has become a tool for achieving desired ends in place of respect properly earned. Instead of respect, fear is induced to achieve aims and objectives. Power for good or for ill has come to the fore more than the call of duty according to the interest of the people as expected under extant rules and policies. With self respect among the people and among the policy makers things will improve. To earn and retain respect in the reform process, we should move away from Information to Communication Management.

COMMUNICATIONS MANAGEMENT

There are building blocks of communications management which must be well known. To know these elements, research is primary. Focus should be on the message and the receiver, especially on what the receiver knows and believes, and his/her expectations and needs.

Opinions on public issues are diverse. Accordingly, the public policy maker must have the courage to confront opinion fragmentation; know the cultural and other usages/differences in the population; and be in a position to segment the audience for targeted presentation of information. Another research issue is believability of source (sender and medium), familiarity and credibility. The past record of a source and its consistency are useful in establishing believability. Also useful in the same endeavour of establishing believability is the level and source (cause) of ignorance. Finally research should be directed at feedback for elicited response to a felt need; evidence of possible buy-in; and content design to best media and best ends.

READY TO GO – The Process

Building up research information is for the purpose of enabling the communications process to start. Before engaging the processes consider:

- how do we stand now?
- who are we not reaching and why?
- how would we like to stand, really?

With respect to the last consideration, the issue is whether we choose to serve in public office or to seek power or to both serve and have power.

Whatever the predilections of the policy-maker, what we need, at our level of development, must not be under-rated. So the policy maker who is communicating a reform agenda to the people have a duty to review the building blocks of communication along the following lines:

- try new ways of delivering the message
- ask and answer the question:- why should we be believed this time?

A satisfactory answer to the above question would help the government/reform promoter in the design and pre-test of the message, for example through flag flying.

To send the message across requires media. Well known media of communication are radio, television, print, telecommunications, information technology, and traditional media. Which ever media is chosen, effectiveness will depend on the compatibility of message, media and audience. The interpersonal communication channel remains an option that must be kept handy, even though mass media is plentiful.

THE ROLE OF THE PRESS

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, provides a role for the press, which can be considered the mandate of the press. A reality check of the press need to be done all the time because of the climate of corruption and cynicism that envelope the press. In order words, what is the press? Is it the journalist or the institution?

In discharging the mandate of the press, bear in mind that there are the government owned and the privately owned press. There are potentials of the government press being a bridge or being a rampart. A bridge oriented government press will conduce to a government that is geared towards services, while a rampart oriented government press will be well disposed to power calculations of the policy maker.

Similarly, the private press could be a watch dog or an attack dog. According to Justice George Sutherland, "a free press stands as one of the great bulwarks between the government and the people; to allow it to be fettered is to be fettered ourselves". Fettering the private press will hamper the press in discharging the mandate granted by the constitution. A licentious private press on the other hand, which only attacks the reform agenda, will wreck the polity and abuse the mandate. James Russel Lowell, was therefore correct to say that

"i du believe with all my soul in the gret press freedom to pint the people to the goal and in the traces, lead them"

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Issues in the polity are bedevilled by tug of choice. Therefore, the ideology or framework of public choice must be clarified in order to leave no one in doubt about the boundary of action. When ideology is clarified, public debate becomes focussed, because there is agreement on purpose and destination. Also the policy maker and the press can then stake out the audience and territory of communication.

In message design, respect by the policy-maker for the people would require that communication rather than information be adopted.

When choosing a media, preference should be for familiar sources and media. Both the government and the people should participate in determining what we debate.