



**Communicating Agricultural Policies Using The
Media For Food Sufficiency In Nigeria**

Oshega Abang

*Department of Linguistics And Communication Studies,
University of Calabar
abangoshega@yahoo.com*

ABSTRACT

In the last three decades, 1976-2016, Nigeria and Nigerians have been grappling with the problem of food sufficiency for its teeming population. In the process, several policies and programmes have been formulated albeit poorly implemented. The poor implementation of agricultural policies, it could be stated without equivocation, has been traced to the lack of understanding of the concepts, poor awareness creation and sensitization before and during policy initiation and implementation. The problem specifically is said to be the lack of sustained media awareness cultivation mainly to influence people attitude and imbibe the culture of sufficiency that would have effectively been propagated by the media. This paper seeks to highlight how a sustained and aggressive media sensitization and dissemination can influence citizens' attitudes towards any given programme. Two theories of media influence and dependency models are used to test the hypothesis. The research, it is hoped, will inculcate in the citizen the enduring habit of adapting the norms propagated in the media.

Keywords: Sensitization, information, food security, food processing, food preservation, food sufficiency.

INTRODUCTION

Media development statistics in Nigeria reveals that over the past 20 years, the media industry has greatly expanded such that now the nation boasts of over 200 government-owned broadcast stations, 120 private broadcast stations and over 40 daily newspapers and weekly magazines (Arogundade, 2013 p.3).

The Nigerian constitution obligates the media to monitor

governance and hold the government accountable to the people in accordance with the directive principles and policies of the state, which defines the primary purpose of governance as the welfare and security of the people. The extent to which the Nigerian media has met this constitutional expectation has always been a contentious issue with some scholars believing that media performance in this regard has been hampered by poor attention to citizen-driven development reporting (WAAC, 2013 p. 6).

For instance, Nigeria has in the last three decades formulated and implemented several policies and programmes in Agricultural development and food sufficiency for the teeming population. But the reality today is that Nigerians are wallowing in hunger and poverty even when trillions of naira have been spent on programmes such as "Operation Feed the Nation and the Green Revolution. The School to Land, The Rice and cassava revolution and the Agricultural Database are others just to mention a few. This paper seeks to analyze the policy options vis-à-vis the role of the media in educating the citizens on the benefits of these programmes in the economic diversification as well as setting the Agenda for making agriculture as an option for a prosperous Nigeria. The paper holds the view that citizens perception of agriculture as laborious and degrading will not change, unless they are adequately sensitized and well-informed to enable them to know the advantages of food sufficiency and to accept the reasons proffered on why all hands must be on deck, the methods and rewards of the desired change especially in propagating agriculture as option for food sufficiency, economic prosperity and poverty alleviation.

Specifically, the paper believes that unless there is effective communication between the government and the governed, especial at the grass root level, Nigerians will not respond willingly to necessary changes.

Thus, because the task of remodelling a nation demands an open awareness of national consciousness and an attitude of mind directed towards the desired goals, there is the need for a mass enlightenment, media advocacy and sensitization of the citizens to work towards the achievement of the set objectives.

1.0 Objectives of the study

This paper on media sensitization for food sufficiency seeks to highlight the need for Nigerian to imbibe the agriculture policies and programmes formulated and implemented with a view to making agriculture an option for a prosperous Nigeria.

It seeks to highlight how adequate sensitization through strengthening the capacity of the media to report and mainstream agricultural production and food sufficiency can positively engage with hunger and poverty concerns in reporting.

Specifically it seeks to identify the gaps in media sensitization of the citizens as well as explore ways of overcoming whatever the challenges are, that hinder the media from performing its statutory obligations to the citizens. In doing this, the paper will suggest ways of building the capacity of the media to set development agenda by ensuring that agricultural issues especially those bothering on food sufficiency are mainstreamed.

Significance of the study

The study is significant to the extent that the findings and recommendations of the study would be used to engage media stakeholders on how to improve media reportage of agricultural produce with the ultimate aim of contributing to food sufficiency, hunger and poverty reduction. The paper is not unmindful of the fact that Nigeria's economic growth in the past years has been anchored on growth in the non-oil sector and that more work needs to be done to entrench and sustain the contributions from the agricultural sector if only to bring about reforms in agricultural production, processing and preservation.

Statement of the problem

It is often said that if existing knowledge on how to produce, process and preserve agricultural products are generally applied, about 90% of the present hunger and dearth of food sufficiency in Nigeria would have disappeared (Oshega, A. 2005. P 3). A good government, it is reasoned, does not simply keep its people informed but keeps itself informed of the way people are thinking and behaving. Such a strategy serves as a feedback mechanism which also enables the government to know the needs of the people and their reactions to government policies and programmes. Nigeria is heavily endowed and agriculture is a branch of the nation's economy, providing employment for about 30% of the population. Apart from hydrocarbon of which Nigeria is the sixth largest exporter of crude oil and has the second largest known deposit of national gas in the world, Nigeria agricultural sector has suffered low output which has led to massive importation of food items to feed the ever increasing populace. In this Earthly life, one of the foremost basic needs

of every living individual is food. Whenever people fail to solve their own food problems, the destinations of such people remains doubtful (Chuks Orji, 2016) (<https://www.modernghana.com>). Today, un-usual conditions of malnutrition, hunger, starvation and infectious disease outbreaks are very common because there are lots of problems facing food and agricultural development. Specifically, the absence of free and affordable modern enlightenment and awareness of modern agricultural education programmes for farmers, especially in the rural communities, poses a problem manifest in the production, processing and preservation of cultivated food items, in which an estimated 20-40% of yearly harvest is lost during harvest.

Methodology

Budgetary allocation to agriculture is said to be grossly inadequate when compared with similar allocation to other sectors. Within the agricultural sector itself, there have been lopsided allocations to production and processing. This has often resulted in considerable and consistent neglect of preservation. This paper is an attempt at determining whether the lack of awareness or sensitization of the citizens or the low level of education on preservation serves as a major contributory factor to food insufficiency. The study covers the period between July 2015 to August 2016, being the period of cultivation and harvest of agricultural products. Six media establishments consisting of three audio visual (television) and four audio (Radio) establishments were selected to determine whether these media establishments have sensitized or interpreted their social responsibility in connection with educating or creating of agricultural production, processing and preservation; and whether they have used their reportage or not to influence needed behaviour change and reforms, especially as it relates to local or rural poverty, hunger and food sufficiency, all of which is the most prevalent crisis now. Two approaches were adopted with specific focus on variations between the patterns of behaviour change found in urban areas and those in rural agricultural practices. In doing this, the paper used the survey method to elicit data on the level of enlightenment campaigns and educational programmes evolved by various media organizations to educate the citizens on agricultural production, processing and preservation to curb the prevalent food crisis and insecurity. To achieve this purpose the paper adopted the Dependency theory of the media and relied heavily on the model espoused by Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach and Melvyn Defleur (1979). This model deals with media role functions in relation to audience dependency.

There include but not limited to:-

- i. The resolution of ambiguity or uncertainty in the interpretation of situations which audiences are able to make;
- ii. Attitude formation
- iii. Agenda-setting
- iv. Expansion of peoples system of beliefs; and
- v. Clarification of values-through the expression of value

Four research questions were asked to determine the level of sustained exposure to media programmes on preservation of agricultural products: the research questions include:

- i. Have agricultural agencies in anyway patronized or engaged media organizations for the purpose of adequately sensitizing the citizens on methods of agricultural production and preservation?
- ii. To what extent have media establishments given priority and prominent in awareness creation towards agricultural product processing and preservation?
- iii. Have media programmes/reportage made any significant impact in curbing the challenge of food security?
- iv. Should the media be effectively engaged in the sensitization of the citizens in agricultural policies and programmes?

The paper believes and strongly too that responses from these research questions will provide the necessary data for analysis of the problem as well as make the people to understand the meaning of the world around them with a view to making them to play key roles in shaping their decisions and levels of participation in approved policies and programmes.

Literature Review

Nigerian, it could be said, has a vision for her citizens and this has elaborately been captured in the 2011 Kuru Declaration which embodied the desire to build a truly great democratic country, a politically United nation, the desire to reduce poverty and the need to create wealth by offering farmers improved irrigation, modern machinery and crop varieties to help boost agricultural productivity (NEEDS, 2004). But Nigeria currently faces a threat from hunger-food insecurity that can either derail the country from a difficult but promising journey into prosperity or compel the nation into a more aggressively pursued era of reforms in their agricultural programmes and policies,

which would reflect food sufficiency for citizens. The assumption is that, for every policy or programme initiated in agricultural production for implementation, funding was made available and that there have always been a buy-in of stakeholders to ensure that success is recorded. But the question still remains, why are Nigerians suffering from hunger and mal-nutrition when agriculture produce is abundant? In 2011, for instance, the administration of President Jonathan launched an Agricultural Transformation Agenda which was managed by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. The intended outcome was to promote agriculture as a business, integrate an agricultural value chain and make agriculture a key driver of Nigeria's economic growth (Adesina, A. 2012). This was to achieve the seven core areas of concentration which were specified as essential to the achievement of the agenda. Unfortunately, public enlightenment and sensitization was not considered or listed as a priority. Yet the task of remodeling a nation demands an open awareness of national consciousness and an attitude of minds directed towards participation in any programme. The truth is that, for any programme or policy to be successful, there is always the need to embark on mass enlightenment of the entire citizenry towards the achievement of its set objectives. In this regard, there must be a high level of sensitization and awareness creation using the media as it would require influencing the people's beliefs as well as their behavioural patterns and prepare their minds to accept new changes, new orders and possibly new life-styles. (Danbaba Danju, 2016, p 4). The media over the years has played an initial role in sensitization using education, enlightenment and motivation of the nation through information gathering and dissemination on the advantages of any policy objective.

Although, many Nigerians believe that successive governments' budgetary allocation to the Agricultural sector did not prioritize or provide adequate support for food processing and preservation, there are clear indications that agricultural produce can, if adequately preserved or processed, serve the populace all year round; but that there is hunger because the people are not adequately enlightened or given early warning signs using the media to enable them to effect behavioural change. (Abubakar, M. 2016 p. 6)

Specifically, Nigeria has in the past years implemented a policy that is said to have dismantled several decades of endemic corruption associated with fertilizer distribution, provided more than N40 billion through commercial bank guarantee to finance seed and fertilizer supply; substituted cassava flour for wheat exported over 2.2 million

locally milled rice on commercial scale (Monye, 2013p 4). In spite of all these, the general populace is still suffering from food insufficiency, insecurity, hunger and mal-nutrition. The observable shock today is the increase in the prices of food items which are most commonly consumed in our homes such as vegetables, grains, flour, meat, fish and other perishable food items, especially, seasonal food items. The question is, can Nigeria overcome food crises and insecurity, given the laudable programmes initiated? Studies reveal that an estimated 20-40% of year harvest is lost during processing, lack of information and knowledge of proper storage facilities make harvested foods to be attacked by pest. Nigerian farmers have a high level of illiteracy and as such need access to media education, enlightenment and sensitization to enable them to imbibe modern farming methods (Naija Quest, <http://naiyaquest.com>).

Diagnostic views

The challenge of food security has been a subject of academic concern. From the diverse challenges encountered in the policy arena to the diverse socio-political crises confronting agricultural policies and implementation since the operation feed the nation programme about 30 years ago, agricultural experts have dissected almost to its minute details due to the challenges which food security in Nigeria has had to confront (Mosunmola Umoru, 2016: p 4). Thus, that Nigeria has gravitated from one existential challenge of food security to massive importation of food items is not for lack of intellectual proffer, nor absence of adequate theorizing. The challenge has been that the quality of enlightenment or sensitization falls far below expectation of a country that boasts of over 200 government-owned broadcast stations, 120 private broadcast stations and over 50 daily newspaper and weekly magazines (WAAC, 2013). The media plays a key role in all democracies as the chief purveyor of information. Citizens consume and interpret media information to make take informed decisions and judgments. This is why the conduct or misconduct of media institutions often impact, heavily on agricultural policies and programmes. Media coverage is indeed such a crucial component of government policies that it often brings extra pressure to bear on the concepts of social responsibility of the media to educate and enlighten, create awareness and sensitize with a view to mobilizing the citizens to cultivate the desired attitudinal and behaviour change towards a policy objectives. Four research questions were, therefore, put before respondents for their comments why Nigeria still suffers from hunger and mal-nutrition in the face of abundant agricultural produce. Put in other words, assessing their level of

involvement in the areas of sensitization and awareness creation through programme contents airtime allocation, and effective engagement of the media by relevant authorities.

Discussion and analysis

Despite recent government efforts aimed at boosting agriculture, Nigeria is still a food deficit country (Monye, 2013 p. 14). Although there are abundant arable land, good soil and a suitable climate, with regular rainfall to support various types of crops throughout the year, only 40% of these are currently cultivated; we therefore, ask the following questions.

Question: have agricultural agencies in anyway engaged or patronized media organizations to enable them to sensitize the public on agriculture processing and preservation?

Answer:

Table I contain the responses elucidated.

	CRIN/C TV	NTA TV	CRIN/C R	HIT FM R	CANAN FM (R)	PARADIS E FM (R)	TOTAL	%
Always	10 (28.5%)	3 (8.5%)	7 (20%)	6 (17.1%)	3 (8.5%)	6 (17.1%)	35	29.1
Often	5 (15.1%)	7 (21.2%)	5 (15.1%)	7 (21.2%)	3 (9%)	6 (18.1%)	33	27.5
Sometimes	5 (12.1%)	8 (19.5%)	8 (19.5%)	3 (7.3%)	10 (24.3%)	7 (17%)	41	34.1
Hardly	-	2 (22.2%)	-	4 (14.4%)	3 (33.3%)	-	9	7.5
Never	-	-	-	-	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	2	1.6
Total	20	20	20	20	20	20	120	100%

Although devices for assessing information are becoming increasing available and affordable, the result in table one shows that 35 or 29.1% patronage has been offered to the media for sensitization of the peasant farmers for agricultural processing and preservation, which is grossly inadequate.

Question II: To what extent have media establishments given priority to the sensitization of the peasant farmers on agricultural processing and preservation?

Answer:

Table II contains the responses elicited.

TIME	CRBC TV	NTA TV	CRBC R	HIT FM R	CANAAN FM (R)	PARADISE FM (R)	%
News adjacent	6	6	4	-	5	4	12.1
Family Belt	12	8	4	4	-	5	55.5
Any time	2	6	12	-	-	6	32.4
	20	20	20	4	5	15	

Table II reveals a near absence of agenda setting on the part of the media to sensitize the peasants due partly to the commoditisation of media contents and programming with the commercialization of news and advertorials, the media industry is now operating a market economy.

Answer:

Question III: Has the media programme/reportage made any significant impact in curbing the challenge of food security.

	PRINT MEDIA	RADIO	TELEVISION	TOTAL	%
Yes	22 (21.8%)	30 (26.6%)	48 (51.6%)	100	100%
No	50 (50.7)	20 (20.6%)	30 (28.7%)	100	100%
Don't know	28 (11.6%)	50 (66.6)	22 (21.8%)		
	100	100	100	100	

Table III: Reveals that the media as part of corporate social responsibility has been providing airtime and space in both print and electronic media for awareness creation as observed in the eye-witness accounts on Television of perishable food items and the dearth of transportation to convey harvested food items from the rural to the urban areas where there are most needed and have economic value.

Question IV: Should the media be effectively engaged in the sensitization of citizens on Agricultural processes and preservation?

Answer:

Table IV shows the responses elicited

	PRINT MEDIA	RADIO	TELEVISION	TOTAL	%
Yes	25	35	40	100	100%
Sometimes	35	25	20	80	80%
Always	40	40	40	100	100%

Table IV: Reveals the desired need for effective engagement of the media in the sensitization of the citizens towards agriculture product processing and preservation. It corroborates the assertion that the task of remodelling people demands the creation of an open awareness and an attitude of mind directed towards influencing people's beliefs and re-set their behavioural patterns to reflect current changes.

CONCLUSION

As a function of national development, the role of the media is that of an explainer as observed everyday through its ability to enlighten the people. Basically, the print media and the electronic media have played vital roles in providing opportunities for the free enlightened and responsible discussion on food security. But what has been lacking is the sufficiency of airtime and space for a two-way contact between the public and agricultural experts on food processing and preservation. A successful behavioural intervention would be required if the nation is to overcome the challenge of food security. Observably, the social constructs that dictates human behaviour seem to have affected the peasants both negatively and positively. The negative behaviours of individuals as observed in wastages are often traced to the absence of preservative. While the positive behaviour is manifest in the high hanging fruit and tied to the commoditisation of the Media (James Watson, 2003: 206). A comparative analysis of how the prominence of media awareness has confronted the challenges of food security has shown that commoditisation of media services would positively affect

the impact which the media would have made if relevant authorities would adequately engage the media in the sensitization of the citizens towards food processing and preservation. The study reveals that relevant authorities in Nigeria have not and may not engage media services towards awareness creation and sensitization of the peasants in the areas of managing wastages as well as storage facilities. This has been said notwithstanding the fact that Nigeria media industry has recorded major landmarks since the missionary era of Henry Townsend being that he established the first newspaper in 1859 and the first television station in Africa in 1959. Although media programmes have interpreted their social responsibility to include raising awareness on wastage management occasioned by the dearth of storage facilities, poor evacuation of food items from rural to urban areas, and the need to establish processing facilities to accommodate perishable food items. There is also the need for media establishments to be effectively engaged and mentored towards making rural reporting an indispensable component of development reporting.

RECOMMENDATION

Given the vital role which the media plays in national development, the paper recommends that:-

- i. Media institutions should be convinced of the need to consider food security in general and food processing and preservation in particular as specialized areas of reportage, that requires special desks and constant capacity building
- ii. The media should be effectively engaged to enable them to do more of “issues behind the news reporting to bring to the front burner, ideas that will encourage government and other institutional stakeholders to be more responsive and responsible to the challenge of food security.
- iii. Funding organizations should continue to assist media support groups with resources for periodic media assessment, research and survey of coverage of agricultural produce issues, the outcome of which are needed for the initiation and implementation of agricultural policies and programmes if only to address the worrisome issues of wastages due to lack of storage and preservatives, in agricultural producing areas.

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