



AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Promoting Indigenous Knowledge

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EDITOR

INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION PATTERN AND TRANSFER OF INNOVATION.

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Introduction

Indigenous communication pattern is an integral part of indigenous knowledge which Anand (2001) views as knowledge generated by local people through their daily life experiences in facing challenge of nature and society. A more detailed definition by Nakata and Langton (2005) puts it as innovations, and practices of indigenous and local communities around the world, developed from experience over centuries, and adapted to the local culture and environment, transmitted orally from generation to generation. No matter how the concept is defined, there are common elements that make up indigenous knowledge base. These elements as reported by Isaac, *et all* (2011) include: collective ownership, existence as stories, songs, folklores, proverbs, cultural values, norms, beliefs, rituals, local languages, and agricultural practices including the development of plant species and animal breeds.

Indigenous knowledge: Characteristic and Definition

The indigenous communication sources are diverse, depending on the type of information carried. Indigenous institutions, local authorities in different fields, and individuals serve as sources of information which most times is regarded more important by the audience than the content of the message. The channels of communication include folk media, example puppet shows, drama, interpersonal channels, storytelling, village organizations, markets, drinking spots, and wherever people meet and interact. Messages carried via indigenous communication channels are: entertainment, news and social exchanges. Indigenous information systems are dynamic, and are continually influenced by internal creativity and experimentation as well as by contact with external systems (Flavier, *et all*, 1995).

Characteristics of indigenous communication systems

There is need to examine the characteristics which are unique to indigenous

communication which in turn influence its pattern. This attempt leads to identification of some characteristics to include:

Complexity: Indigenous communication modes and channels reflect the social structure of each community, this varies from one cultural background to the other. There is a vast network which Ogwezzy and Ayedun-Aluma (2006) describe as typifying both individual and group communication methods in the distribution of information, power and social control. This scenario does not present a simple arrangement of information exchange.

Function of channels

The channels operate to diffuse information in form of news making waves (within the community, most times with different versions), education of the local audience on requirements of customs, tradition, values held as fundamental to existence of the society, entertainment, leadership issues, economic opportunities and innovations adopted by other indigenous people.

Nature of Audience:

The audience are close to each other, exchange information in a friendly atmosphere and align their decisions to the content of messages received. Organic solidarity means sameness in language, expectations and operate within the same environment. This appears as a dominant and persistent feature of indigenous communication.

Direction of Information flow: Indigenous communication takes both horizontal and vertical directions of flow of information. For example where the traditional council is the source, vertical flow of message is discernible, whereas in the market place horizontal flow becomes inevitable since the transaction requires persons to be at equal or near level.

Purpose of Communication

The information needs of human society is basically similar. Successful decisions reached both at the individual or group level may in fact depend on quality or availability of accurate information. The indigenous people's desire to hear and be heard is described by Orewere (1991) as the desire to share meaning.

Other characteristics are that; there is a ***well laid-out and stable network linked to the surrounding communities***. Indigenous communication ensures that ***group and or community interest supersedes those of individuals*** irrespective of a status, age or gender.

Relevance of indigenous communication pattern to transfer of innovation
Studies by Thai, *et all* (2011) have identified that of the three mechanisms of diffusion of innovation (trickle-down, ripple mechanism and network mechanism), with their corresponding underlying communication models (transmission, interpersonal communication and social network), the social network was quite suitable for the indigenous community. This is why it becomes imperatives to outline some significant relevance of indigenous communication pattern to transfer of innovation .

In the first place, indigenous communication has *value* on its own, not only for its functions but also to understand the pattern which is expressed as an integral part of indigenous knowledge base.

Exogenous channels have *limited range* of coverage, this limitation has the potential to hinder transfer of innovation which is crucial to development. Orewere (1991) suggests that socio-metric analysis for understanding flows of influence and information, the roles of existing hierarchy of power and esteem is important before deployment of modern mass communication system in any environment.

Furthermore, effective communication will rest among other factors on acceptability of the message. For transfer of innovation, adoption is the final stage of usage of what is transferred. The indigenous channels have *high credibility* and so very likely to facilitate transfer of innovation that is in harmony with the recipient's needs and environment. Channels of indigenous communication remains very vital vehicle for social change. Once a large network is reached and message successfully passed, change is inevitable. Successful transfer of innovation results in change. It is vital to recall that transfer of innovation is primarily a communication process, which experts classify as *development communication*. This therefore implies that indigenous channels of communication becomes a useful tool for the collection and publication of information on development projects.

Participatory approach to development requires that the local people play active roles, indigenous communication channels *offer such opportunities* to the people. It can be concluded that sufficient efforts put into development are those which incorporate channels of communication indigenous to that environment.

Indigenous communication pattern in Nigeria

Nigeria with about 167 million people represented by 250 ethnic groups with diverse languages and religious faith (Kwintessential,2011) ultimately typifies a vast network of active persons communicating daily. Indigenous communication modes and channels which define pattern present both geographic and cultural variations. Orewere, (1991) observes that indigenous modes and cultures reflect the social structure of each community and are determined by the totality of the historical and economic experiences of the people. Communication experts differ sharply in the categorization of indigenous communication pattern.

Overlapping examples in different modes and channels make classification an issue of debate. This chapter ,therefore, prefers to exclude diverse view points on the categorization and concentrate on patterns that have common elements in all indigenous societies in Nigeria. On this premise ,therefore, indigenous communication patterns is examined under the following groups:

Indigenous institutions. These institutions are creations of every society meant to handle different problems or needs of society. Traditional authorities and socio-political organizations are custodians of a peoples' cultural heritage, and therefore must be understood in the context of African communication (Ogwezzy, *et all*,2006). Some examples include indigenous governance structures (Oku Ibom Ibibio, Obi of Onitsha, Shehu of Borno and Ooni of Ife): socio-political institutions (community based age grade ,example village meetings, women's meeting -August meeting, South East, Nigeria); indigenous religious and Kingship organizations.

Communication Pattern: Information flow is a combination of both horizontal and vertical. The sovereign (Chief) most times represents the source when issues that border on development is the focus and requires community attention and participation. The channel used becomes the town crier who makes the message available to the subjects (audience), traditional instruments (drums, gong), with

distinct beating is used to arrest the attention of the audience before the message is sent.

(i) Location-based communication:

In location-based communication, the venue of exchange of information is regarded as the channel. Indigenous communication takes place everywhere people meet and exchange information. Channels of indigenous communication based on locations include the road, the farm, market place, river and social gatherings, to mention a few. On the way to the farm, exchange of information may be between two or more persons with either acting as source. Exchange of information is limited to whatever the two transmits; there is a greater interpersonal interaction and feedback is immediate.

At the market place, information of available goods and services, prices from neighbouring markets are exchanged. Information on virtually all aspects of community life is exchanged irrespective of the credibility of the source.

(ii) Names as communication media

Names give identity to people, places, events and times. In this context therefore names, given to people when they are born become channels of communication. Expectedly, the source of information for names is the parents who are of diverse background, they then send the message (which is the name) through a channel (which is the ceremony) to the audience (which are those present at the time of christening). Indigenous communication pattern reflects the values society hold in high regard; it is therefore easy that indigenous name will carry a lot of messages about a person, his/her origin, culture or descent. For example a name like "Nkamanse" among the Ibibios of southern Nigeria, conveys doubt of survival of the child due to infantile death of (previous) successive births. The hopes of the parents, current events of importance and celestial events that may have attended the birth are all given consideration in naming the child.

(lii) Folkmedia: This media is comparable to the modern mass media and remains the most researched and popular forms of indigenous media. Various terminologies are used to describe this important indigenous channel of communication as "traditional media, "informal media or "oramedia". Ansu-

kyeremeh, *et al* (2001) defines folk media as “any form of endogenous communication which by virtue of its origin form, and integration into a specific culture, serves as a channel for messages in a way and manner that requires the utilization, of the values, symbols, institutions, and ethos of the host culture through its unique qualities and attributes”. A list of the components of the folk media as enunciated by Valbuena (1986) include: festivals, plays, puppet shows, dance, song, storytelling and poetry. The use of indigenous instruments like drums, gongs and flutes and indigenous language expresses values and lifestyle of the people which is part and parcel of their essence as a people. There is no doubt that transfer of innovation that uses the folk media will likely be very successful in a largely developing society. In classifying the folk media, Sreekumar (2001) lists four forms to include:

- (a) Oral tradition
- (b) material culture
- (c) social folk customs and
- (d) performing arts.

The same expert concludes that familiarity, personal contact, common language, intelligibility, credibility and acceptance makes it universally acceptable among rural folks. Transfer of innovation will become easier and successful if this media is consciously used because of the originality and receiver's confidence in the sources of messages. Contrastingly, some school of thoughts , point out to the fact that, western literature has downplayed on the power of the media to capture peoples' thinking in bringing about behavioural change.

The folk media offers an efficient means of transfer of innovation in our environment, given our level of development and our cultural configuration and affinity. Some experts view this media not only as an intangible artifact of a culture but a memory of collective people. With horizontal and vertical information flow possible by this media in addressing local interests, and concerns via the language which the people understand, and are familiar with, it becomes a powerful instrument to transfer innovation. A combination of both modern media and the folk media becomes even more efficient since urban audience are still strongly tied to their culture.

(iv) **Extramundane Channels:** This is also described as exoteric media of indigenous communication. Some researchers describe it as “supernatural communication” partly because, (the source is regarded as obtaining information from another which is invisible to the ordinary sense organ of sight-the eye), the components of the communication model and the processes are beyond appreciation by the ordinary human sense organs. This depicts some form of (extra sensory) perception, transmission and reception of messages which is beyond the physical realm of existence hence “extra MUNDANE. Akpabio (2003) explains this channel of indigenous communication as involving supernatural beings ancestors, spirits, gods, the supreme God or when they involve processes, elements or abilities that are superhuman e.g. in witchcraft, reincarnation, etc., Indigenous communication is not only vertical, from the rulers to the subjects, it is also horizontal. Individuals communicate with society through physical and metaphysical means. A farm owner, for example, may mount a charm conspicuously on his farm in order to stress private ownership and to scare off human intruders (Wikipedia,2011). In identifying the pattern discernible in this channel of indigenous communication, Ogwezy (1991) proposed two forms: bottom-up and top-down.

Bottom-Up

Example here can be found in public gatherings which draw a large number of active players in a communication process for the purpose of meeting communal needs. Akpabio, (2003) identifies festivals, ceremonies, divination and ancestral worship as channels where the information is exchanged from the crowd to the co-source (the chiefs or juju priest). The message of festivals remains in the memory of the audience and their coming out to celebrate simply gives the audience the status of source of information.

Transfer of innovation through this pattern will require the change agent to work out a means of getting majority to imbibe the message by getting permission to pass the intended innovation on such days when the people gather. Thereafter, if accepted, the information diffuses.

Top-down In this pattern of communication, the source is held with much reverence and messages are taken with much seriousness. Ogwezy (2006)

reports that this pattern entails a supernatural being through its priest/agents or signs communicating his/her pleasure or displeasure, directives, orders to its adherents and priest. It is expressed in speeches regarded as sacrosanct and in dreams where messages are to be decoded properly for use. Telepathy is another example where messages via the inner and outer spiritual or humans and material powers are exchanged.

This channel of communication appears closed to non-initiates and therefore may act as set back to innovation transfer except the 'human source' is involved.

(v) Myth

The communication dimension of this channel lies in its attempt to provide answers to supernatural and natural existence of life on earth. This Indigenous communication channel carries messages like certain aspects of reality and history of things that is believed to have occurred in the past. Myths provide explanation to the unseen, confirm social themes and gives its audience the satisfaction of having adequate information on diverse subjects which preserves society. This channel passes information from the old to the young who then continue to send the message to the younger generations. The problem with this mode is that messages are held sacred and must remain so, therefore, innovation transfer may be hindered if mixed with myths. It characteristically moves in one direction and leaves no room for questioning.

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ABOUT THE BOOK

This is the second edition of *Agricultural Extension and Rural Development*; the first edition was published in 2005. Between then and now, many issues have come up both at the global and local levels that have impacted on the farm families, agricultural production and the environment. The issue of climate change is with us now and concerted efforts are being made to find ways to mitigate its impact. These may include developing new varieties of seeds that would be tolerant to the climate, or changing the farming systems of the people. Also, advances in the internet have provided new ways of extending technologies to farmers and the impact of these needs to be investigated and published.

Some of the new topics included in this second edition that were not in the first edition include; climate change and adaptation by farmers; ICT use in extension services; HIV/AIDS and the farm families; Gender mainstreaming in agricultural development;



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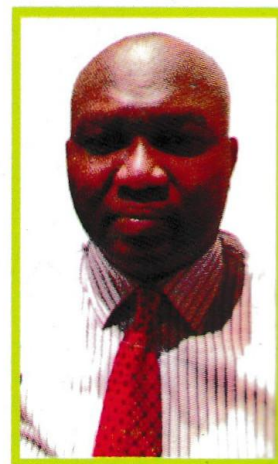
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Geographic information systems and sustainable rural development. Included also is a section on Indigenous Knowledge in agricultural development. Of course we have updated the other regular topics in the field that were included in the first edition. In this second edition too, we have ensured gender balance as more women scholars have contributed chapters than before. The audience of this book will not only be students, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels, but will include policy makers, researchers in agricultural development, as well as practitioners in the field.

THE EDITOR

Ike Nwachukwu is a Professor of Agricultural Extension and Rural Sociology at the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. He did his post graduate studies at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. He has published extensively in journals, books and mimeographs. Until 2001, Ike Nwachukwu was a Research Scientist (Extension) at the National Cereals Research Institute, Badeggi, Niger State. He was the former Director of the Extension Centre of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture. From 2005-2006, he was an Associate Research Fellow at the University of Glasgow, United Kingdom. Between 2012 and 2013 he served as a Research Advisor, Shell Petroleum Development Company, Nigeria. He is a member of the Agricultural Extension Transformation Agenda of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. Ike Nwachukwu is married to Yinka, a Senior Lecturer in the same University, and they have three daughters.



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