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CHANGING THE ATTITUDE OF RURAL DWELLERS TO ENHANCE RAPID DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Introduction:

An obvious measure of acceptability of any government depends on how such a government cares for her citizenry no matter their place of residence and the citizens' attitudes towards such a government. One of the fundamental objectives of the Babangida administration is its strong determination to improve the living conditions of our rural dwellers. This renewed national awareness is a positive step in the right direction, for it is likely to rectify the mistake of the past. The purpose of this paper is to reorientate the Nigerian populace to sustain the present national consciousness and to pursue an aggressive and integrated rural development policy which will ensure effective mobilisation of our abundant human resources in the rural areas.

In our multiple roles as professional psychologists, administrators, teachers of various categories, counsellors and above all, as Nigerians, we change our rural dwellers' negative attitudes towards meaningful rural development that are geared towards improving their material and psychological well being. By awareness campaign we mean an attempt to influence another person's attitudes, values and behaviour in a positive direction. Education which is so designed to change the contents and progress of our thought is one of that form of propaganda awareness that this paper is advocating.

The Concept of Attitude and Attitude Change

The study of attitudes which people hold towards various issues and objects has been of interest to psychologist and other social scientists. From most of the empirical work available, it is obvious that attitudes are not innate but acquired during socialisation process and therefore subject to change and modification (Sherif and Sherif, 1956; McGrath, 1964). The concept "attitude" has been variously defined by different authorities in psychology. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) offered us a comprehensive definition of attitude by stating that attitude is

"learned predisposition to respond in consistently favourably or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object." Allport (1935), a celebrated authority in attitudinal study, defined it as "mental and neural state of readiness, organised through experience, exerting a directive and/or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related."

In general, attitudes provide a ready basis for interpreting the world and processing new information. It is also a way of gaining and maintaining social identification. The concept of attitude includes the idea of "unconscious determinant", of behaviour and dynamic interplay of conflicting motives, whose importance has been stressed by psychoanalyst and other social psychologists like Katz (1960) who suggested the following motivational functions of attitudes thus:

Knowledge:

In regard to knowledge function, people seek a degree of predictability, consistency and stability in their perception of the events around them and the world. Knowledge represents the cognitive component of attitudes, which gives meaning and direction to experience. The cognitive component consist of the ideas, beliefs and knowledge which the attitude holder has about the attitude object. Some Nigerians are known to regard living and developing the rural areas as a job meant for uneducated people, who cannot find jobs in the urban areas, this negative orientation has to change to enhance rural development.

The Adjustive Function:

This refers to the favourable responses the individual achieves from others by displaying socially acceptable attitudes. Socially acceptable attitudes convey the idea of reward or goal attainment in terms of socially valued object. Having attitudes which serve the adjustive function may be the means for reaching the desired goal, or such attitudes may be identified with experiences that have previously led to the satisfaction of such goals. This is often referred to as the emotional component.

Value Expressive Function of Attitude:

In this the individual achieves self-expression with regard to cherished values. For instance, open expression and commitments on the part of the individual are the main stays of value expression.

In other words the behavioural component emphasizes one's action tendencies toward cherished objects. Such cherished objects in

this case would be global rural development of the infrastructures like improved farming methods, electrification, accessible roads and good markets.

The concept of attitude is used here to denote the sum-total of man's inclinations and feelings, prejudices, bias(es), preconceived notions, ideas, fears, threats and convictions about any specified subject, in this case rural development.

Attitude Change

There are essentially two primary types of attitude change theory today. One sizeable group of theories, known as cognitive consistency theories stems from the work of Lewin (1947). There is also a variety of behaviourist/learning theories of attitude change, and most of these can be traced to the influence of Hovland (1951). In the Cognitive Consistency Theories, the underlying bias is the Gestalt notion that people have a need to organise, simplify and integrate their perceptions and cognitions.

This is assumed to be true of cognitions as of perceptions. Our beliefs and thoughts about the external world are assumed to be organised in to meaningful, unified, and "Symmetrical" structures. Others are Dissonance Theories (Festinger, 1957). Learning/behaviourist theories, the essence of these theories is to predict the relationship between a given independent variable and attitude change, in terms of the known or conjectured relationships of that independent variable to learning. On the assumption that learning of the persuasive material will be conducive to attitude change, one then predicts that the relationship of the independent variable to attitude change will follow from its relationship to the learning mediator (Campbell 1950). For the purpose of this paper the theories given by Kretch et al. (1977) are pertinent.

These theories posit that attitude change is brought through exposure to additional information, changes in the group affiliation of the individual, enforced modifications of behaviour toward the object, and through procedures which change personality, Kretch, et al. (1977)

Rural Dwellers and Rural Development

Majority of Nigerians, both urban and rural dwellers, erroneously thought and believed that with attainment of political independence the living standard of the people was going to be improved considerably. Perhaps this expectation could have been achieved, but for the greediness, selfishness and fraudulent nature of many Nigerians who were in the helm of affairs during the "Oil boom days."

The various problems and lack of basic infrastructures in rural areas in Nigeria today is basically due to lip service paid by previous governments in Nigeria since Independence. It is this utter neglect which has been responsible for the widespread negative attitude of the rural dwellers towards even the traditional occupations which is the chief occupation of rural dwellers in Nigeria.

An adequate food base is an essential prerequisite for development. Unless this need is met there can be little hope for successful economic, social and political development. Agricultural development in most countries of the world is a necessary precondition for economic development unless they are fortunate enough to have other resources which can be exported to finance food imports. Even when this is possible such imports tend to divert from the accumulation of capital necessary for industrialization and provision of infrastructures and would be unwise from the developmental stand point. By and large the problem facing rural development in Nigeria seems to be the pervasiveness of political elites with urban issues. For them modernisation and development are often confined to the urban cities. It is the vogue in many Nigerian cities, for the elites to wear traditional dress on formal occasions and take political advantage of their ethnicity. Despite these "bows" to their cultural heritages as rightly observed by (Bates, 1981), there has been a growing gap between the urban and the rural masses. Policies often show a misunderstanding of or outright opposition to the traditional occupation (farming) and social structures.

One will not doubt the fact that even at the present moment a greater proportion of Nigerians live in villages that are predominantly rural areas and their pattern of occupation and lifestyle are somewhat different from those living in urban settings. Majority of the rural areas do not have portable water, no access roads, no electricity. In fact, the basic amenities that modern civilisation offers are lacking in the rural areas in Nigeria. Consequently the behaviour and beliefs of our rural masses are conditioned and deeply influenced by the rural environment.

This paper contends that for any meaningful transformation of our rural areas, we must have thorough understanding of the farmer, who make up the bulk of the rural man, his home, and the community of which he is a part. We should be able to identify what is going on within the rural people, should be able to know their relationships and interactions, their groups, institutions, organizations, and the culture

they share, all of which influence their attitudes and behaviour. This lack of knowledge and understanding of rural people was demonstrated in 1987 with the outbreak of the yellow fever in several parts of our rural villages in the country.

Relief to the affected areas and victims could not get to them in time due to lack of accessible roads and other related infrastructural facilities. The neglected rural dwellers have been aware of the empty promises and lip service paid by past regimes and political elites who are only desperate to preserve their power. This persistent state of affairs has alienated the rural dwellers, and this has made them develop negative attitudes towards rural development.

Their negative attitude is further heightened by the behaviour of the Nigerian political elites who go to their rural dwellers when they need power base and only to discard and forget all about them immediately they achieve their goal. Kiwanuka (1979) sums it up nicely when he observed that those who make rural development plans should stop treating the rural dwellers as people who do not want good transport, as if rural markets are not essential for their produce.

The present Babangida administration in Nigeria seems to have a serious concern for rural development. This is demonstrated by the establishment of the Directorate for Rural Development which has bases at the Federal and State levels respectively. The directorate is charged with the responsibility of carrying development to the grass-root of the Nigerian society by focussing attention on food, roads, water and rural infrastructures. This is a commendable venture, but this paper suggests going beyond just that. It is advocated that the establishment of the directorate should form part of a comprehensive package of national development. It has been noted that quite often major government policies with laudable ideals fail to score appreciable success because they remain largely unco-ordinated, and without specific and long-term objectives. It is asserted that there should be a well integrated and comprehensive rural development policy. The present effort at rural development in the country should go beyond the haphazard opening of rural roads, and indiscriminate provision of infrastructures in rural areas.

Some previous governments have tried at one time or the other to implement piecemeal programmes aimed at orientating the world view of the Nigerian population. Two cases in point were the ethical

reorientation by the Shagari administration and the war against Indiscipline by Buhari/Idiagbon regime, but these measures could not have been used to. It should be emphasized here that the implementation should be devoid of political intrigues that normally characterises the functioning of government in Nigeria, and work together to mobilize the abundant human resources that are lying dormant in the rural areas to enhance comprehensive and integrated rural development.

To achieve this objective the human resource factor is of paramount importance. And since the human attitude to work, work ethics, devotion to duty and the like, fall within the domain of psychology and other related social sciences, practitioners of human behaviour should not shy away from showing practical interest in modifying the rural dweller's attitude, and interest in developing and transforming the rural areas in Nigeria.

Inkeles and Smith (1974) summed it succinctly when they stated that "any modern nation needs participating citizens, men and women who take interest in public affairs and who exercise their rights and perform their duties as a member of a community larger than that of the kinship network, ethnic affiliations and the immediate geographical locality."

Our rural dwellers in Nigeria are rooted in traditional agriculture, locked in traditional land tenure system which does not augur well for large scale mechanised farming to enhance rural development. To overcome this narrow world view of the rural populace, it is asserted that scientific knowledge of the rural people and their life is essential to achieve a comprehensive and integrated rural development. Such a knowledge will enable the policy makers and implementers to develop positive attitude and concern for both the rural people and towards their own duties.

Conclusion:

It is necessary to reaffirm here that to change the attitudes of the rural dwellers in Nigeria needs a concerted effort of Nigerians. Governments must improve infrastructures such as markets, roads to move produce, proper storage facilities to prevent spoilage, and irrigation projects where necessary in order to increase production. Managerial capabilities must be upgraded, particularly at the middle and lower supervisory levels, in order to implement rural development schemes otherwise the overall long term national development plans will not attain their goals.

The communication factor which is very crucial in changing attitudes, should be made less cumbersome and unnecessary bottlenecks removed. The accessibility to the source of information should be made readily available to the rural dwellers for this will go a long way to enhance their attitude change. Another way we could change the rural dwellers attitude is to work through other non-professional agents like voluntary associations, local government officials, churches, teachers and even school pupils. There is no doubt in my mind that professional psychologists will be of help if called upon to assist in the changing of the rural dwellers attitudes.

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