

# Social Mobilisation: Tool for Effective Grassroots Communication for National Transformation\*

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The thesis of this paper is that meaningful and lasting development can only be based on the mobilisation of our people for effective transformation of the developmental process. However, the continuing search by Nigeria since independence for more dynamic, efficient and relevant strategies of achieving real development does imply frustration with past attempts as well as our inability to maximally and positively exploit these resources for the upliftment and well-being of the Nigerian people. This has resulted in the marginalisation of the vast majority of the people in the transformation process, particularly because of the low level of their education and, therefore, low consciousness which not only made them vulnerable to fraudulent manipulations by politicians, but has created among them a culture of *helplessness*, *apathy* and *indifference* about the happenings in the political and economic process.

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## Mobilisation sociale: instrument pour une communication des masses efficace pour une transformation nationale

### Résumé

La thèse de cet article est basée sur l'idée que tout développement significatif et durable ne peut qu'être axé sur la mobilisation de nos populations pour une transformation du processus de développement efficace. Cependant, la quête continuelle du Nigéria depuis son accession à l'indépendance des stratégies plus dynamiques, efficaces et appropriées pour aboutir au développement n'insinue pas la déception des efforts du passé ainsi que notre incapacité à faire usage maximal et positif de ces ressources pour le développement et le bien-être du peuple nigérian. Le résultat a été la négligence de la grande majorité du peuple dans le processus de transformation, plus, spécialement à cause du niveau bas de leur éducation et, par conséquent, l'inconscience relative qui, non seulement les a rendu vulnérables aux manipulations frauduleuses des politiciens, mais aussi a créé en eux une culture d'incapacité, d'apathie et d'indifférence aux actualités du processus politique et économique.



## Introduction

There is in Nigeria all that it takes to aspire and achieve greatness — massive and fertile land resources, well-researched packages of technological innovations, favourable weather all year round, considerable financial resources and a huge, creative labour force. What is lacking, according to extensive research conducted by the Political Bureau of 1987, is the near absence of a central body to mobilise the abundant resources at the country's disposal through the intricate use of linkages such that development becomes relational rather than terminal as was the case in the past. Going by the various development plans executed in Nigeria, it is clear that ideas and resources are not what we lack but the ability to translate the beautifully-packaged ideas into concrete developmental programmes. The effective mobilisation and organisation of millions of small-scale farmers and entrepreneurs into viable producer co-operatives will certainly go a long way in stimulating material production to satisfy the demands of the society. The bedrock of a self-reliant economy is material production and since there is a dialectical relationship between production and consumption, material production plays a decisive role. Human beings are, therefore, the active agents in any development process, hence:

...development does not start with goods and things. It starts with people — re-orientation, organisation and discipline. When the accent of development is on things, all human resources remain latent, untapped, potential, and a society can remain poor amidst the most opulent material resources. On the contrary, when a society is properly oriented, organised and disciplined, it can be prosperous on the scantiest basis of natural wealth. (*Ministry of National Planning*, 1980, pp. 20-21).

Basically, therefore, genuine development is deeply-rooted in the qualitative transformation of a nation's human resources. Development essentially relates to the capacity and creative capability of a people to effectively transform natural resources of their environment into goods and services through the imaginative application of their creative talents and labour power. This clearly debunks the erstwhile view in Nigeria that money is the basis of development. If this were so, the billions of naira that have been expended on various projects particularly during the oil boom days would have taken us to the developed nations club. Unfortunately, our development planning had been on sectional allocation of financial resources, with the naive hope that the flow of foreign technology and experts will develop our society while our own people watch with admiration. Even then, a study of the economic history of any of the developed countries, be it socialist or capitalist, has clearly revealed that:

No development had been possible without the mobilisation of farmers, without a transformation of social relations and without the intelligent application of human creativity for the transformation of resources into goods and services. (Gana, 1987).

## Rationale for a Social Mobilisation Agency

Social mobilisation is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria. Indeed, it has always been uppermost in most development programmes of the country with varying degrees of success and names. In August 1975, for example, all the Commissioners for Information and Cultural Affairs met for five days in Lagos discussing 'Dynamic Publicity for Mass Mobilisation' in Nigeria. In the past ten years, there have been the Jaji Declaration, Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, National Orientation Movement, Reconstruction, Reconciliation and Rehabilitation programmes of Nigeria's post-civil war. Other examples of mass mobilisation of Nigerians for specific social programmes include the currency change-over (1971), traffic change (1973), National Census (1973), and metrification (1973). Social mobilisation clearly has ancestry and, with the benefit of hindsight, the factors that made our current economic, disciplinary and moral problems possible made the latest attempt at social mobilisation via MAMSER inevitable.

The previous programmes were fundamentally flawed because each addressed just one part of a multifaceted problem. Operation Feed the Nation and Green Revolution were concerned with the country's economic problems in relation to food production. It properly saw the abandonment of agriculture as the cause of the problem but failed to see it as merely symptomatic of a much larger national problem. The Jaji Declaration, Ethical Revolution and War Against Indiscipline fell into the same temptation of mistaking the part for a whole. Tough talking and *koboko* discipline were seen as the panacea for societal ills. Unfortunately, as soon as the coercive measures were removed, people relapsed into their old habits.

The Directorate For Social Mobilisation (commonly referred to as MAMSER after one of its programmes) synthesised the various approaches already attempted and came up with the first wholistic approach to the nation's problems. Hence, the more ambitious approach that has replaced the single theme of previous campaigns with several cleverly interwoven themes. On account of its breathtaking reach, the apparatus for achieving its multifaceted aims is much more elaborate than the media campaign strategy previous attempts adopted.

Social mobilisation can therefore be seen from the perspective of the Political Bureau's definition:



Social Mobilisation must be seen in terms of involving the people in taking part actively and freely in discussions and decisions affecting their general welfare. In other words, social mobilisation and political education should aim at increasing people's level of awareness or cognition of political and other issues so that they can apply their energies positively and participate actively in the social and political life of the country. Social mobilisation and political education programmes should aim at creating a wholly new political culture that will transcend the multitude of negative factors that have hitherto characterised the Nigerian nation (Political Bureau, p. 530).

Thus the machinery set up for achieving its aims and objectives is both a learning process and activity programme. As a learning process, MAMSER has, through workshops, seminars and the establishment of resource panels, sought to tap the immense intellectual resources of the academic and various professional groups. As an activity programme, the 12-point mandate of the directorate has been encapsulated into three closely-related programmes via Mass Mobilisation for Self-Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) concerned with physical act of mobilisation, mass education under which a literate society by 1992 is the goal, political education on which platform a politically aware, conscious and enlightened third republic rests and its special programmes for mobilising the military and the family.

The goals of mass mobilisation for self-reliance, social justice and economic recovery is informed and guided by Nigeria's development objectives of building:

- a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
- a great and dynamic economy;
- a just and egalitarian society;
- a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens; and
- a free, democratic society.

In trying to actualise these five directive principles of state, the Directorate came up with some programmes namely: Political Education, Mass Mobilisation (Self-reliance, Social Justice, Economic Recovery and promotion of leadership by example), Mass Literacy and Armed Forces MAMSER programmes. A brief description of these programmes follow, especially as it affects the teeming grassroots people who have benefited immensely from the increased attention the directorate has paid to them.

## **Mass Mobilisation**

The Mass Mobilisation For Social Justice, Self-Reliance and Economic Recovery programme is popularly known as MAMSER. The Mass Mobilisation Department pursues a programme of multi-dimensional

mass awareness campaigns. It has, through seminars, workshops, exhibitions, community theatre, youth programmes, mass rallies and self-reliance programme, like the 'Operation Food First' programme, the promotion of excellence in the public service, the renewed War Against Indiscipline and Promoting Leadership by example, endeavoured to relate to the directorate's different target groups.

On social justice, MAMSER is to serve as the voice of the voiceless and assist those that may not have had easy access to justice on account of poverty or other disabilities. In the past two years MAMSER has been able to fight social injustice side by side with the masses in cases such as wrongful detention and unjustifiable treatment of innocent people. The programme has proved popular with the people at the grassroots and MAMSER has succeeded in bringing hope to many Nigerians who ordinarily would have continued to languish in jail.

Through these programmes, the directorate has evolved a grassroots-oriented mobilisation strategy and conscientised the masses at the grassroots level to stand up firmly in support of social justice. Its campaign for self-reliance, a vital ingredient in our drive towards economic recovery, has painstakingly organised the rural women into viable economic groups. The mobilisation campaign has also seen the re-emergence of co-operative societies where they were extinct, rejuvenation where they were moribund and fresh establishment where such groups were non-existent. The existence of trade groups/co-operative societies will provide the pivot upon which the success of such programmes as the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFFRI), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Better Life for Rural Dwellers (BLFD) and the newly-established People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN) will revolve.

Also important is the directorate's economic recovery programmes such as popularising the National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND), a programme in which the government has invested about 4.1 billion for small-scale industries to thrive in the country. Through the mobilisation efforts of MAMSER, an awareness was created and the NERFUND programme was geared into immediate action to the extent that the co-ordinators felt we over-mobilised the public. Also, the National Conference on Structural Transformation for Self-reliance and Social Justice held in Lagos between 10 and 13 October 1989 is a clear manifestation of the conviction of MAMSER that Nigeria has all it takes to achieve greatness. The conference sought, among other objectives, to make the much-dreaded Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), a way of life for the masses of this nation by moving from successful adjustment to sustained transformation which will ultimately give the people hope.



In this light, some of the fundamental objectives of structural transformation of the Nigerian economy and society can be recast as follows:

- creating a conducive social and technological basis for sustainable development;
- transformation of production structures through agricultural and industrial development;
- facilitating the greatest possible development of agriculture-fed industries so as to ensure massive production of food and industrial raw materials;
- minimising the phenomenon of external dependence and reliance on foreign aid;
- ensuring the fullest possible utilisation of our human and material resources;
- transformation of the consumption pattern to reflect a self-reliant productive structure;
- elimination of mass poverty;
- creating opportunities for useful employment on a scale that will harness the potential of the unemployed.

One can go on recounting the gains of the directorate in mobilising the grassroots people for the evolution of a new social order but suffice it to say that different segments of the social strata have been effectively mobilised in this direction.

The directorate has special programmes for the Armed Forces and security agencies and they have been launched in all the military and security formations nationwide. Today, the manuals designed for this purpose are being used extensively for mobilisation purposes in all the forces. In addition, the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces recently inaugurated the Armed Forces Consultative Assembly (AFCA) to ensure that the disengagement of the military in 1992 is total.

## **Political Education**

The political education programme assumed a systematically phased character from inception because it was recognised that raising the

political consciousness of the masses is the most critical function of MAMSER. Awareness is a positive resource for development. On the other hand, ignorance is a serious constraint to development and orderly progress. Hence, the conceptualisation of the set objectives for political education through intellectual contacts with renowned academicians and intensive media and grassroots campaigns. The programme has moved to organising important fora such as people's parleys, village square meetings for grassroots reach, conferences, symposia and seminars for the urban elites.

In order to achieve these lofty goals, the directorate designed a three-phased programme. The first phase, the mobilisation phase, focused on mass rallies nation-wide with the sole aim of mobilising Nigerians to decisively reject the sectional, divisive, corrupt, selfish, dishonest and directionless politics of the past for mature, peaceful, orderly, issue and development-oriented politics. During the first phase, a nation-wide political awareness tour was undertaken round the country. About 54 Local Government Areas were visited and more than 74 mass rallies were held over a period of 78 days. The basic message of MAMSER during the period can be summarised thus: The nation-wide political awareness tour sought to make Nigerians decisively reject the massively corrupt politics of the past characterised by rigging, money, tribalism, regionalism and religion. The directorate appealed to all Nigerians to use their votes wisely to elect good leaders of honour, integrity and great vision for progress and real development.

Nigerians were urged to reject corruption in favour of honour and transparent honesty; to eschew confusion and stagnation of the past for peaceful progress; to reject slavish dependence and poverty in favour of self-reliance and greater productivity. Currently, the second phase which places significant emphasis on teaching people practical skills of translating their domestic rights into real political power, by voting for good candidates with good programmes, is progressing. The directorate has recently published a political education manual intended to highlight the basic rights and responsibilities of citizens. Part of this phase actively involved MAMSER in co-operation with the National Electoral Commission (NEC) in the verification of voters list and claims by political parties. During the period of politicking by the defunct political associations seeking registration as political parties, MAMSER persistently called on them to involve the grassroots people in the formation of their associations but the politicians characteristically chose to ignore the warnings by the government, NEC and MAMSER, and played the game as it was done in the past. The political associations underated the level of consciousness among the rural people until NEC's result showed that they have not actually interacted with the grassroots enough to elicit their support.



Hence, there were ghost names on the membership register of most associations. Now, the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) has directed these aspirants to go back to the MAMSER-suggested path of grassroots involvement which they (the politicians) had hitherto rejected. Grassroots involvement is a necessary step towards the achievement of a better society which Nigerians are longing for. It is, therefore, hoped that the political aspirants will give this new experiment all the support it deserves so that the parties can derive their existence from the mass participation of people and thus survive to sustain democratic ideals during the third republic.

The third phase would focus (during the first quarter of 1990) on how the people will demonstrate their increased consciousness, political maturity, and demonstrate skills acquired thus far by ensuring a free and fair local government elections. MAMSER is of the belief that the nation must pay greater attention to the issues of building an enlightened electorate, raising a patriotic and honest leadership, formation of popularly-based political parties, ensuring free and fair elections and formation of popular organisations in order to ensure the defence of democratic rights of the people and social justice.

MAMSER, through its political education programmes, promises to ensure unity, peace, social justice and progress in the country. MAMSER is optimistic that political apathy and the culture of silence in the face of brazen oppression by a few will be a thing of the past particularly with the creation of two new political parties: Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC)—which are grassroots-oriented. MAMSER also believes that these negative traits will give way to the politics of ideas, development, unity and peaceful progress in the third republic.

## **Mass Education**

The Political Bureau had, in its report, identified illiteracy and ignorance as the major impediments to the greatness of our society and as such recommended the establishment of the Directorate For Social Mobilisation. Concomitantly, it is pertinent that mass literacy should be the cornerstone of its existence.

Thus, the Directorate For Social Mobilisation set for itself, a target of making about 25 million Nigerians literate by 1992. The results from the states after the first phase of the programme which ran between July and December 1988 showed that only about half a million people benefited from the phase. The whole programme which has run through the stages of research, analysis and programme formulation to actual activity, will continue as soon as funds are available. This is a giant leap in

its determined march to the realisation of a dream to substantially reduce illiteracy in our society by 1992. The programme is, however, being hampered by the lack of funds to acquire the needed teaching aids and pay for the services of the teaching personnel. The directorate is determined to continue this popular grassroots programme as much as the finances at its disposal can permit.

## **Social Mobilisation and Communication**

The most important tool of social mobilisation is communication. An effectively managed communication network that takes the varied nature of the target audiences into consideration and tries to satisfy their needs is highly desirable for a programme of social engineering. Thus, the directorate has recognised the stronghold of the urban elites on the radio, television, newspapers, magazines, debates, seminars, workshops, conferences and other sophisticated media and, therefore, use these media to communicate with them. In pursuance of this, the directorate has paid working visits to more than 98 percent of the media houses (print and electronic) in Nigeria during which time the chairman fielded questions on the aims, objectives, achievements, prospects and problems of social mobilisation in a depressed economy. The interviews and discussion were usually frank, educative and illuminating to the extent that both sides have come to acknowledge the enormity of the problems of the majority of our population in the rural areas in terms of inadequate information and basic facilities needed for good living. Also the various professional associations such as the Nigerian Political Science Association, Nigerian Labour Congress, National Council of Women Societies and National Council of Nigerian Youth have been found to be veritable channels for communicating important socio-political messages to these crucial groups of people.

Even then, the majority of the productive population to whom development-oriented communication should be directed are in the rural areas where they are cut off from vital information needed to improve their lots. A farmer, for example, is regarded as indifferent to innovations on new ways of improving crop production. Whereas the farmer would be willing to use such information, he is not prepared to leave certainty for uncertainty in adopting new methods because he would rather have small yields that are consistent and reliable than big yields that could be followed with total crop failure. What this amounts to is that information packaging for ruralites has not often conformed with their felt needs and are therefore irrelevant. Grant (1978) expressed the view that:



It seems to me that we (scientists and journalists) use wonderful terminology such as 'changing the change agents' and 'the green revolution' and many other clichés. I think we are pretty good at communicating among ourselves, but when we get out into the remote rural area it is obvious that we are not so expert in there — where communication is so vitally needed.

Indeed, there is an urgent need to re-orient our mass media organs towards the active involvement of the rural population in the free flow of information to enhance their economic well-being. It is important to evolve a grassroots approach which favours the establishment of rural radio, community newspapers, face-to-face dialogue, public address system, town crier or the gongman, age/social groups, the minstrel, village square meetings, extension services, community television viewing centres and opinion leaders. The traditional media, says Ugboajah (1978) have served many generations such that a careful harmonisation of their strong points with the modern media is what is needed to fully integrate the ruralites with the new trends. He said:

... if bells are used for summoning a religious gathering or announcing the presence of an itinerant tailor or petty trader in a rural neighbourhood, if the village gongman uses his wooden gong for summoning elders to a meeting in the village square, why should these channels be discarded in summoning the villagers to health demonstration, to a co-operative farming lecture, to a child welfare workshop, to an adult education class or to an agriculture extension exhibition? If palm fronds are displayed in front of compounds to communicate that some items are for sale therein, why cannot this approach be adopted to communicate the availability of new cocoa seedlings awaiting distribution in the compound of local agricultural representative? (Ugboajah, 1978).

This concept of traditional communication is what Ugboajah termed 'oramedia' which to him are great legitimisers, because they are highly distinctive and credible. He advocated the use of community-based communication as against the over-used electronic media which are elitist and of little use for public enlightenment programmes in rural areas. There is the need to break with the 'urban-oriented colonial heritage' in Nigeria's communication programme format planning such that the messages fit both the channel and the medium to achieve the desired result.

It is no wonder that the rather indiscriminate adoption of modern technology for the electronic media has led to the perennial 'sleeping' and 'waking' of most of the gadgets and in some cases this sleep has resulted in premature deaths. One may wonder why the use of redifusion and the rugged celluloid film was hastily jettisoned for the modern AM/FM and video films when the expertise required to optimally utilise and maintain them has not been acquired. In Tanzania today, the indigenous delivery systems have proved to be more effective in serving the people's needs than the imported types. This is possible because a convenient merger of the 'old' and the 'new' was carried out. For example, the villagers formed themselves into listening groups and act as inter-personal relays for radio

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

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

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

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

### **Constraints of Grassroots Reporting in National Transformation**

Grassroots economic activity reporting is inundated with certain



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

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

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

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

## **Media Ownership**

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

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

## **Specialised Training for Reporters**

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



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

## **Urban Biased Development**

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

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

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

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

## **Mobilisation Constraints**

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

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



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

## Conclusion

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

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