

Chapter 11

The 2012 Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) Anti-Subsidy Removal Strike Action and Its Implications for Development Communication

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focused on the national strike organized by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) at the dawn of the year 2012 to protest the removal of petroleum subsidy in Nigeria and it explored its implications for development communication. By using documentary research method, the study reviewed relevant literature and discussed the findings. In line with the theoretical framework on which the study is anchored, it observed that the media are powerful medium for carrying development messages to the grassroots. Besides, it also performs watchdog function so as to make the government responsible to the people and allow them to participate actively in the development processes. Therefore, the chapter recommends that government at all levels in Nigeria should ensure adequate participation of the people in the initiation, planning and execution of development projects and policies.

INTRODUCTION

The 2012 National Strike organized by the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) in conjunction with the Trade Union Congress (TUC) was a reaction to the controversial removal of fuel subsidy by the then Federal Government of Nigeria. Sequel to this, the presidency announced the unilateral removal of petroleum subsidy and adjusted the pump price upward on 1st January, 2012 even when it claimed it was consulting Nigerians. This action received stiff opposition from the organized labour who mobilized the Nigerian masses for a national protest cum mass rally to make their grievances known to the government.

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Prior to this time, there was a subsisting understanding between Congress and the Federal government in 2009 that removal of subsidy will not commence until certain conditions have been met. These include the fixing of all the refineries and building new ones, regular power supply, and provision of other social infrastructure such as railways and repairs of roads as well as eliminating the corruption associated with supply and distribution of petroleum products in the downstream sector of the oil industry (Business Day, 2012). These critical issues were however, not addressed before the controversial removal of petroleum subsidy by the then Federal Government of Nigeria.

After exhaustive deliberations and consultations with all sections of the populace, the NLC, TUC and their pro-people allies demanded that the Presidency immediately reverse fuel prices to N65. They directed that indefinite general strikes, mass rallies and street protests be held across the country with effect from Monday 9th January, 2012, if the Government failed to do so (Business Day, 2012). Besides, since the government was perceived to be unwilling and unable to accede to the yearnings of the people, the strike action and mass rallies held as planned.

Fuel subsidy was before the coming of the Jonathan administration, a policy of federal government meant to assist the people of Nigeria to cushion the effects of their economic hardship. Conceptually, fuel subsidy seeks to enhance financial capacity but also to accept the implied financial losses by it in the spirit of its national responsibility to ensure the well-being of the populace (Onyishi, Eme & Emeh, 2012).

It must be stated that the cost of such strike action is usually heavy on the economy and citizens. Past governments had tried, though not effectively, to enlighten Nigerians on the dynamics of fuel subsidy. The President Goodluck Jonathan's Administration deepened the education with the revelation that the beneficiaries of fuel subsidy were not the masses, but a few wealthy Nigerians and those in the business of importing and distributing fuel (Business Day, 2012).

As a nation, Nigeria has encountered numerous tribulations and crises through her turbulent years of post-independent initiatives and self-rule. Some of the recurrent problems and national issues were occasioned by the country's peculiar circumstances, while others emerged as part of the normal evolutionary and developmental processes. Nonetheless, the country has remained one indivisible nation with functional state and federal systems as well as the presence of fairly active news sources (Okoro, 2013). As far as its economic system is concerned, the national economy is described as a mixed one that allows for a free enterprise, the use of market forces, and foreign exchange market (Okoro, 2013). Hence, the issue under consideration has been recurrent in all the successive administrations since Nigeria gained her independence.

Okoro (2013:542) reported that the country's diverse and pluralistic structure and composition is fundamentally similar to most African nations, especially in the sub-Saharan region in terms of ethnic groups, linguistic pattern, tradition, values, beliefs, and historical origin. With the exception of a few homogeneous nations, Nigeria is one of the numerous heterogeneous African societies that speak several different languages and dialects, have different cultures and political orientation. He added that English language is the lingua franca (official language), and it is widely spoken in many parts of the country as the language of commerce and social interaction.

Although the present day Nigeria is, according to Okoro (2013) composed of thirty-six (36) states and a federal capital territory, Abuja with a total of seven hundred and seventy-four (774) local government areas, the country's origin was traced to the evolution of the three dominant ethnic groups (Igbos, Hausas/Fulanis, and Yorubas) that have influenced and shaped the country's social, cultural, and political experiences.

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