

Chapter 4

Recursive Inter–Ethnic Violence and the Failure of Development Communication in Africa

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ABSTRACT

This chapter traces the evolution of development communication and examines how it has helped or hindered peaceful coexistence in Africa. Starting with the dominant paradigm of the 1950s and 1960s, it explains the critical and dependency model of the 1970s as well as the participatory paradigm of the 1980s before concluding with the most recent iteration which is the social entrepreneurship model of McAnany (2012). These provide a backdrop for examining the place of communication in the recent developments in the six African countries which are among the 10 fastest growing economies of the world today. The final picture to emerge is one that underlines the importance of strategic communication in planned social change, especially in promoting peace and curbing inter-ethnic violence.

INTRODUCTION

Africa, the origin of human existence, has been bedeviled with numerous recursive violent confrontations from ancient times, long before the earliest contact with explorers and colonialists. With a landmass of approximately 11.7 million square miles, it covers 20.4% of the world's total land area. The population stands at about 1.2 billion now but will reach up to 2.4 billion by 2050. Although Africa is reputed to have no less than 835 ethnic regions (Murdock 1959), this is likely to be an undercounting and it is widely believed that if African national borders were based on ethnic or linguistic identification as in Europe, the resultant countries would be more than the sum of all the countries in the world today. With so many ethnic groups many of which are in very close proximity to each other, and further challenged with limited resources, inter-ethnic rivalry and conflicts seem to be inevitable.

In this chapter, we highlight some of the historical and recent inter-ethnic violent incidents against the backdrop of ineffectual development communication strategies and practices that could have prevented

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or at least ameliorated some of the violence. The best solution to inter-ethnic conflicts is prevention, which is best built on effective communication, congenial meeting of minds, and common understanding. Violence and conflicts are evidence of communication failure first at the interpersonal level and then at the mass society level. Development communication is one of the ways to promote peace and conviviality within and between ethnicities. This appears to not have worked in Africa yet.

In the front part of this chapter, we trace the course of development communication paying attention to the distinct phases which are now referred to as the paradigms, starting with the original first phase or dominant paradigm of Daniel Lerner and Wilbur Schramm through to the current phase which McAnany (2012) has referred to as the entrepreneurial stage. Interspersed between these two phases are a potpourri of six or so variegated models which are conveniently labelled dependency, participation, communalism, oramedia, “RIOC”, cultural warrants, and triple heritage. Explaining these approaches to development communication sets the stage for an analysis of the environment for recursive violence in five selected African countries which are Sudan, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa. At the backend of the chapter, we conclude that development communication in Africa is still largely misunderstood, unappreciated, under-utilized, and consequently has not served Africa very well, in spite of the reality that the continent is culturally communication-rich. The much touted African renaissance will require more strategic uses of traditional and modern communication, without which significant development will continue to elude large sections of the continent.

DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION: WHAT IT IS

The term ‘development communication’ is still not fully understood and it is far from clear how communication contributes to development despite more than half a century of continual scholarly and practical attention to the salient issues of the subject in all the regions of the world. Regardless of whether it is called development communication or communication for development or development-support communication or social change communication, it is taken to refer to the understanding that the state of socio-economic growth and social change in a community is a function of the extant communication processes that include interpersonal and mass media contexts. Development communication, as a term, came into greater use in the 1970s, following the coinage by Quebral (1972, 1973) who defined it as the art and science of human communication used in planning for and bringing about strategic transformations of a society to alleviate poverty and achieve better and more equitable socio-economic growth that involves the larger unfolding of the potentials of individual peoples.

Properly conceived, development communication is the practice of purposively and systematically applying communication principles, processes, products, and methods to promote positive and desirable change in a community. In this sense, it is necessarily continually evolving and applicable in all human societies, regardless of their levels of economic and technological development as it is primarily aimed at addressing and redressing social problems. Since there are no countries without social problems that can be addressed through communication, it follows that no countries are outside the ambit of development communication. As Moemeka (2000, p. x) explained, “there is no nation in the world that has no development or social change problems ... problems whose solutions are strongly dependent upon intelligent exchange of ideas, cooperation and building of understanding.” The building of understanding and the creating a feeling of social togetherness and community unity are some of the essential functions of communication in society. Pervasive social tension and inter/intra-group violence are indicative

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