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Why a new communication research publication in Africa?

The Editors

'Research is a collaborative effort' was probably the first thing we learned in research methodology. We all went through the obligatory 'literature review' in our theses, building our research on the state of research in the field. Yet all of us doing research in the African context experience the difficulty of knowing the research activities of our colleagues. Communication researchers in South Africa may know much less about research in the forty or more departments of communication in Nigerian universities than they know about communication research in Britain or in the US.

*African Communication Research* is a modest attempt to help bring African communication researchers into dialogue and debate about their common efforts. We are fully aware that a science is the product of a conversation from all parts of the globe - together evaluating, questioning, testing, affirming and suggesting reformulations. Yet the editors of *African Communication Research* think that Africa presents its own indigenous problems and aspirations for humanly and socially rewarding communication. African cultures face the common problems of a postcolonial society, the growing oppression of a power elite and global dependency. Our own theories and methods will be greatly enriched by genuine encounters with others in this continent who are working with similar questions and problems.

When the idea of publishing a 'journal' was first introduced in the Faculty of Communications at St. Augustine University of Tanzania, it was immediately noted that there are already many good efforts to publish communication research journals in Africa: *Africa Media Review, Critical Arts, Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies, African Journal of Communication* (published in the US), *African Media Studies*, the new *Journal of Global Mass Communication* and perhaps others we were not aware of. We could see the need, however, for a publication which makes available research findings but which is also a forum for information and discussion about communication research in Africa.

- An overview article describing the current state of a particular area of communication research, indicating some of the major recent publications and research projects, important theoretical trends and debates, methodological issues, and trends toward the future.
- An encouraging and inviting place for the standard research article submitted for peer review and publication.
- Reviews of research and debate in particular regions of Africa by people who are close to what is going on in their country or region.
- Reports on current research, especially research initiatives of younger lecturers and their students.
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- Summary bibliography of publications and research in Africa and comprehensive international references.
- News and information of persons and institutions currently carrying on research on the topic of the issue or other topics and looking for contact information or invitations to collaborate in research.
- Letters and debate on current issues in communication research in Africa.

We have planned a paper edition available at very reasonable subscription costs, but above all we wanted an online edition available gratis so that young researchers, especially students, all over Africa might have easy access to full information on different areas of research.

This proposal was circulated to colleagues in different African countries, especially to those closely involved in editing communication research journals. All noted the relatively crowded field of publications, but all quite warmly supported the kind of publication we were suggesting and many offered their cooperation. With this encouragement, we began to move ahead with the plans, and the administration of St. Augustine University gave its full support. Especially important has been the stimulation of our Vice Chancellor, Dr. Charles Kitima, with his strong interest in research in this university and the promotion of research throughout Africa.

An openness to broader perspectives of communication research

The kind of landscapes of communication research we are opening to are close to the approaches that the late James Halloran, long-time president of the IAMCR, continually emphasised. His famous statement, 'If you ask silly questions, you will get silly answers', may have bordered too much on the sarcastic, but this does point to a task that communication researchers have to keep in mind. We must be able to evaluate the directions of the field, the questions that are being taken up and the priorities for research. The term 'openness', however, implies continual respect for the intellectual capacities and commitments of all in the debate and a genuine attitude of search together.

It is not by accident that we have chosen to put the term 'communication' in the title of this publication and not 'media'. The media, we argue, are only one aspect of the communications of a nation and a continent. Many African scholars have contended that traditional communication (as does Des Wilson in this issue) is equally or more important in the African context, and that there is an intimate relation between the grassroots and the oral and the way our media institutions develop. Some would argue that African cultures are more communalistic, communitarian and oral. Our research must be open to a wide variety of forms of communication which constitute the cultures of our societies.

The reader has by this time noted that the word 'culture' is also continually recurring in this presentation. Yes, we see communication and culture as intimately

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related. Out of our communication come our cultures, and in our construction of cultures we find a common sharing of meaning. To discover how we share a common meaning, in this continent too often wracked with conflict, merits a central place in our research.

Cultivating African theoretical perspectives

Some have questioned as to whether any significant theoretical perspectives have developed among African communication scholars. There have been a great many very specific empirical studies, but rarely have these been given a broader theoretical foundation. Theory which brings together existing empirical research and stimulates further research almost always has a grounding in a confrontation with the broader socio-cultural and political-economic realities of a region or nation. Good theory clarifies our situation 'brilliantly' in the sense that it throws light on a broad range of empirical realities. This, for example, was the significance of the theoretical ground breaking of Stuart Hall and his colleagues in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in the United Kingdom. The work of Hall and others built upon the new perspectives of Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, but was the result of a great deal of conversation among researchers and a considerable amount of vigorous debate with those who disagreed with some of the premises. Out of this discussion and debate came a critical cultural studies research perspective which generated a theoretical movement not only in Britain but around the world.

Twenty-five years ago few would have expected that any significant theoretical perspective would emerge in Latin America. Yet, in the 1980s Latin American communication research had a remarkable period of creativity that not only stimulated a wave of significant research in that continent but caught the attention of the rest of the world. Canclini's concept of hybridisation of cultures and Martin-Barbero's theoretical synthesis in *Communication, Culture and Hegemony* (1993), caused something of a theoretical earthquake in Latin America (to use Martin-Barbero's metaphor) and have been useful explanations in other contexts. These new theoretical perspectives were the result of a great deal of intellectual encounter and conversation among those who doubted whether the existing theoretical framework—and they had them—really explained the realities they lived in. What is lacking in the African context, one could argue, is this intellectual meeting, debate and conversation among those involved in some way in communication research.

The field of communication research has welcomed a wide variety of methodological approaches, and a deliberate attempt must be made to maintain a continual opening to research which borrows from other fields and offers, at the same time, a strong basis for the validity of the results of this research. New methodological approaches often are responses to the analytical demands of new socio-political and cultural contexts. For various reasons, the context of the United States encouraged a more quantitative and functionalist approach in communication research while in Britain and France there were demands for a stronger emphasis on...
cultural analysis and political-economic critique. Latin America developed a type of research which has been concerned with issues of cultural identity. India and South Asia, near neighbours to Africa, are, one might argue, still searching for the most adequate methodological approach. Likewise, research in Africa must face the task of methodology with fresh eyes and a sensitivity to the regional cultural and political demands.

Communication research and our emerging political institutions

Africa is also in an extremely critical historical period with regard to the definition of its basic political institutions. The postcolonial state governed by its inefficient and often corrupt bureaucratic elite is everywhere being pushed to the wall, but there seem to be few alternative proposals of any significance coming forth. Historically, the press, even the popular press, has been an important forum for debating what kind of political institutions are needed and possible in the African context. The press and other forms of media may not be the place to discuss political philosophies, but the media by their choice of material and the way they comment on current affairs are important for creating a popular critical awareness of the value of emerging political institutions. We know that a functioning political system is not formed in a written constitution but in the day-to-day solving of concrete political problems on the basis of what a constitution permits. As these workable solutions emerge it is important to be aware of this and to critically evaluate or affirm this as a good practice. If a national assembly has worked out a particularly effective procedure for making an executive branch accountable, the people need to become aware of this and to give it more institutional grounding in the political culture. A second level of awareness is formed among leaders of the media themselves through their own trade publications. But the academy and the discussion of its research are an extremely important third level of reflexive awareness of emerging political institutions and awareness of how the media and eventually the public affirm these institutions in formation.

The same kind of critical reflexive awareness of emerging institutions is particularly important where issues of human rights and social justice are concerned. We are too easily blinded by ideologies and our fatalistic attitudes toward the status quo. The media may be more concerned with surviving financially and protecting itself from the major power holders than in creating a public awareness of the human and social quality of our societies. Our research needs to give a high priority to evaluating how the media and other forms of communication are encouraging the development of civil society and other forums for debate about the formation of social institutions.

Finally, there must an opening to critical evaluations of our schools of communication. We are aware that there is an enormous expansion of training for media in universities and non university-level institutions. University administrators
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feel that they are under financial pressure to admit virtually all who apply. There is also a strong populist trend in Africa to open up the possibility of a tertiary-level formation to all, especially for those who come from more deprived social and financial backgrounds. It is argued that tertiary-level education has become too much the privilege of the rich. There are many talented poor students who must be given a chance. All this can and must be accommodated, but we need to evaluate and discuss how it can be done effectively.

We are aware that all this is a demanding task and that it will take us some time to give this the right form. Our commitment is to bring this out regularly and continuously. We invite your contributions to this forum of publication, discussion and debate.
Grassroots, participatory communication:  
Is a new vision of communication emerging in Africa?  

Robert A. White, Issue editor

For many involved with communication research in Africa, the study of grassroots, participatory communication may seem quite marginal to the central issues of our field. However, as the articles in this issue make clear, this question is touching the heart of the problem of communication in Africa. The focus of this research is not only how people in local communities communicate among themselves to solve local problems but rather how people at the grassroots level can articulate their views, needs and interests up to the district, regional and national level.

There is a huge communication gap between the modernised elite sector and the vast majority who live in peasant farming, the informal economy or on the verge of survival. If the modernised sector has a wealth of newspapers, magazines and better broadcasting, little of this 'wealth' of information reaches the grassroots. The agricultural extension services and health education services have offices in the regional and district towns, but little of this information is getting to people in local communities and even less is actually brought into the rhythm of their lives. The people live largely through their local, indigenous knowledge and forms of communication. How is the information of the technical sector to become part of the knowledge of the people?

No where is this gap more evident than in the realm of politics. The people at the grassroots generally know little of what their political leaders are doing and make few demands on them. Political leaders, for their part, generally see their election as an opportunity for personal enrichment or to help their clientelistic following, through legal or illegal means. Few see their election as a mandate of accountability to their electors. How do we close this gap so that the people at the grassroots in Africa become truly 'citizens' influencing the decisions of their nations?

There are no easy solutions. The basic structure of communication is still the top-down control system of the colonial period. The colonial masters certainly did not invite the people to tell them what to do and they did not encourage the people to communicate too much among themselves. The system of district and regional commissioners established in the colonial period is still the dominant structure for creating 'silence' and 'non-communication' at the grassroots-as is made clear by the wealth of research on local government in Africa summarised briefly in the review article.
The vision of the independence movements

All of the leaders of independence were aware that for real independence the basic structure of communication had to be changed. None were more clear about this than Nyerere:

‘Growth must come out of our roots, not through the grafting on to those roots of something which is alien to our society. We shall draw sustenance from universal human ideas and from the practical experience of other peoples: but we start from a full acceptance of our Africanness and a belief that in our own past there is much which is useful for our future’.

Curiously, what many independence leaders did was quite the opposite. To carry out their vision, they chose to use the colonial broadcasting and press system, the colonial transport system, the colonial system of agricultural extension and marketing control boards, the colonial educational system and, above all, the colonial state apparatus.

They may not have been able to imagine alternatives because they were in a hurry. Also, part of the problem may have been that they were heavily influenced by the then dominant linear model of communication: source, message, channel, receiver, effects-with feedback to know whether the message had been imposed or not. (Interestingly, this is still the dominant model of communication taught in communication schools in African universities.) They tended to think that they could leave in place the structure and only change the content. They did not fully realize, perhaps, that the structure is the message.

Many of the founders of communication research in Africa - Ansah, Ugboajah, Obeng-Quaidoo, Kasoma, to mention but a few - have seen clearly that the problem of communication in Africa is in the structure. Much of the research on grassroots, participatory communication in Africa goes back to their insights. Ansu-Kyeremeh argues for nothing less than a complete transformation of this structure. He contends that the present centrifugal structure - communication flowing from the centre to the periphery - must be replaced with a centripetal structure-communication flowing from the grassroots to the centre. The review article suggests that his argument that Ansu-Kyeremeh’s views could form the basis for a more general theory of grassroots, participatory communication.

How does a new structure of communication come about?

Out of the crisis of the independence visions in the 1980s and 1990s there has gradually emerged a new discussion about what the structure of communications in Africa could possibly be. The articles in this issue of African Communication Research reflect many of the major themes of this discussion.

A first and central theme running through virtually all of the current research is
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the validity of the local knowledge, the traditional forms of organisation, and the indigenous modes of communication for effective communication in Africa. This is a complete reversal of the conceptions of the modernisation and state-centred models of development.

A second theme is that the most effective 'research' and experimentation are not to be found in the 'established centres' such as Western-oriented universities, but in the constant trial and experimentation that is generally carried on in local communities. It is effective because it is done with the people's awareness of their local farming or health systems, the local ecology and history and the local cultural values. Tarawalie brings this out in his article on how the local people 'blend' the new technology with the existing practices.

A third theme is that the most effective structure of communication in Africa, with roots in African culture, is dialogical - the ongoing conversation, palaver and interchange of all actors involved in the process. As Tarawalie notes, the most sustainable communication for development is an ongoing discussion centring on the questions of the local people but involving those in agricultural or other technical services, representatives of the university-based research centres, political leaders, religious leaders and all other stakeholders.

Evident in the article of Uwah on the 'Nollywood' video film industry in Nigeria, is a fourth theme, namely, that the structure of communication is focused on the issues and questions raised inside African countries, not expecting that the best ideas will come from the outside global communication. The very successful Nigerian film industry has been created almost entirely from indigenous capital, independent of the financial structures linked with the Breton Woods institutions and with little reference to international canons of what film should be.

A fifth theme is the belief that the source of the vitality and creativity of African culture in all aspects - literary, dramatic, scientific, religious - is to be found, not among educated elites, but in the popular, 'intermediate', classes. Karin Barber's fascinating study, briefly summarised in the review article, shows how Yoruba popular drama has been created in the context of the intermediate classes and has become one of the sources of the television and film institutions in Nigeria.

Other themes that are often highlighted include the the communalistic nature of African communication and importance of media that are close to the local community communication, as Des Wilson brings out. Authority gains its legitimacy not by being 'over' the community but insofar as it listens to the community and articulates and coordinates what the community wants to say and do.

B. Mongula in his article brings out strongly the difficulty of introducing a new structure of communication in the context of the highly concentrated power structure that derives from the colonial and modernisation model but that, above all, is so
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closely monitored and guided by the global political-economic system. His conclusion that new movements proposing a new structure of communication will do best by negotiating from a position of power with the existing power structure represents still another important theme.

One issue of a journal cannot hope to include all of the rich nuances of thought in Africa regarding grassroots, participatory communication. We would invite your contributions and will surely publish them in the forum section in the next issues of African Communication Research to be published in September and in December 2008.
Ten major lines of research on grassroots, participatory communication in Africa

Robert A. White

Introduction

A major criticism of research in this area is that it is scattered, superficial and with little significant capacity to explain the social, economic and political problems of Africa. In response to this, the article begins with a rather extensive review of Ansu-Kyeremeh's formulation of a more general, coherent theory of the role of grassroots, participatory communication in Africa. Not everyone will agree with his choice of the four basic dynamics - fostering the centripetal rather than centrifugal processes of national communication, communalisation, indigenisation and the sankofa or renaissance of traditional communication. Nevertheless, his work remains an important theoretical landmark.

A second line of research is concerned with the continued vitality and importance of indigenous communication in African cultures. Marie Riley's and Helen Mugambi's research are good examples of the role of women in developing traditional song, dance, drama, and story telling in contemporary contexts.

Des Wilson's study of the use of traditional instruments in community communication is now something of a classic template of the research in this area.

A fourth important area of research is the study of the way popular arts at the grassroots level - drama, music, and ritual - 'articulate up' the local cultures into national cultures. Karin Barber analyses how the Yoruba traveling drama groups in Nigeria formulated a world view and values that are now important in the Nollywood video film industry.

The fifth area is the enormous mass of research on the validity of local knowledge, local experimentation, and local information exchange networks in the areas of agricultural extension, health, education and many other aspects of African life.

The research issues regarding community-based natural resource conservation community forestry, wildlife conservation, community preservation of fishing stocks, etc. are introduced well in Fabricius and Koch's collection of research reports.

Communication for survival in the face of extreme poverty and the communication foundations for the informal economy, the livelihood of 60 to 70 per cent of Africans, is a seventh important line of research.
The moves for better governance in Africa have given a priority to strengthening local government and decentralisation of administration, but the weakness of communication and media at the local level is a major problem. Some areas for research on communication for local government are advanced as priorities.

A ninth line of research, evaluation of local community administration of educational, health and other services in Africa, is briefly touched on.

Finally, what many would consider the typical research on grassroots, participatory communication – research on communication for personal and social empowerment - is particularly well summarised by Andrea Cornwall, Irene Guijt and Alice Welbourn. They evaluate the comparative strength and weaknesses of the methods of farmer participatory research, rapid rural appraisal and participatory rural appraisal, participatory action research, DELTA (Development Education and Leadership Teams in Action) - widely promoted in Africa and theatre for development.

None of these lines of research is uniquely African, but an attempt has been made to highlight the emphases in the African context.

1. A comprehensive theory of grassroots, participatory communication


Ansu-Kyeremeh’s publications are a useful starting point because he provides a broad theoretical framework for the analysis of grassroots participatory communication in Africa. In this he is building on Ugboajah’s concept of oral, community-based media (1985), the more recent research of Desmond Wilson (1987, 1997, 2005 and 2007) at the University of Uyo in Nigeria, and considerable study of traditional communication institutions in other parts of Africa. In Ansu-Kyeremeh’s view, grassroots, participatory communication is not a matter of a few participatory dynamics in community action but a fundamental remaking of the dysfunctional structure of communication imposed on Africa during the colonial occupation. His perspectives are part of the wave of rethinking that is taking place in agricultural extension, political communication, educational methods and virtually all areas of African life.

A central premise in Ansu-Kyeremeh’s thinking is that the stagnation in African economies, the lack of vibrant indigenous cultural development, very little theoretical creativity, and the continual political dysfunction is due to the lack of building on the indigenous institutional roots of African societies. He envisages four
major dynamics in the revitalisation of African growth: (1) recognition of and reinforcement of the efforts to move from a centrifugal model of development in which innovations are formulated and emanate from a centre of control to a centripetal model in which the innovations are initiated at the grassroots level and are the material out of which nationhood is constructed; (2) communalisation, the recognition that the social action of African people at the regional and national level must be based on the traditional organisation and forms of communication for decision making and action in the local communities; (3) indigenisation, adapting all supposedly improved forms of education, agriculture and other technologies to the core African values, motivations and forms of communication so that these innovations do not supplant but reinforce existing African institutions; and (4) opening a space of freedom for and encouraging what Ansu-Kyeremeh calls sankofa or renaissance of local forms of communication and community rituals. The various publications of Ansu-Kyeremeh incorporate research showing the process and significance for development of different aspects of these four dynamics. Indeed, what Ansu-Kyeremeh proposes has become the dominant paradigm in virtually all writing about development in Africa, even if what is actually taught in universities and what is practiced in governments is far from this. Cultural lag is always with us.

Moving from a centrifugal to a centripetal model of development

In Ansu-Kyeremeh’s view, at the core of the revitalisation of African institutions, especially the communication process, is 'the imperative need for a structural transformation of the socio-political organization of centrifugalism' (1997: 107). The term 'centrifugal' indicates an action which begins in the centre and flows out through a hierarchical structure to the periphery. The centrifugal structure of communication in Africa was installed with the imperial conquests of African as a means of political control, economic extraction and cultural domination of the European nations. The colonial control system attempted to incorporate local community decision making into the centralised structure of action through indirect rule, and set in motion a process of cultural hegemony through the schools. This control system drew in information from the periphery through the reporting system of the district and regional offices, reformulated this in terms of the codes, language and ideology of the colonial government and retransmitted this as the only valid, effective knowledge through the technical extension systems, incipient press and broadcasting and other forms of official pronouncement. Politically, this system implies no accountability to the native people, an inherent characteristic of a centrifugal model. The model of communication is the familiar linear concept which begins with source intentions and seeks the best channel for its message to impose effects on receivers and uses feedback to adapt the message until the source gets the desired effects.

After independence the dependence on the imperial powers continued. The centrifugal system of knowledge and communication was reinforced by the modernisation and strong centralised government planning once the bureaucratic elites prepared by colonial governments got control of the state apparatus (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1997: 92-94).
The weakness of the centrifugal communication process.

Ansu-Kyeremeh's interest in a centripetal communication model began with his studies of the existing systems of the Ghana government's adult education and extension efforts and the analysis of why these were so ineffective. He found that the health, agriculture or youth extension officers who visited the area thought that the informal networks were mostly just frivolous entertainment and idle talk, not worthwhile working with. The preferred communication method was the set lecture method with time for questions. The villagers were often puzzled by these lectures because they seemed so unrelated to their real questions, interests and possibilities. There was little purpose asking questions or posing problems because the answer was always the same: the government has set productivity goals and the villagers had to fall in line. In fact, the agents were often not really that concerned whether the villagers did or did not comply because the agents felt that the villagers were incorrigibly traditional and uninterested in progress, but the agents had fulfilled their mission by presenting the official line of the government. The primary motivation was always technological efficiency, never moral behaviour that would bring honor and respect in the community. There were few stories, no poetic songs and absolutely no proverbs.

Many of the villagers were hesitant about speaking out or voicing problems because they knew that these extension agents were representatives of a control system and that they came to impose predetermined goals that had been fixed in the national planning office. According to Ansu-Kyeremeh, there is a long tradition in villages of keeping silent before these representatives of the central government because they are often suspected of being spies gathering information that might later be used against the villagers (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 1997:40). In any event, these representatives were not taken too seriously because they almost never came through with their promises and would be replaced with still another wave of NGOs, projects and programmes, often with quite different, even contradictory, objectives, in the not distant future.

The logic of the centripetal structure of communication and social action

Centripetal is defined as action which is initiated at the periphery and moves toward the centre. The centripetal model implies a genuine democratisation in which the 'central government derives its power from the villages, not vice versa, as is the case now' (1997: 107). Action starts with the initiatives of the people in grassroots communities to solve their everyday problems of economic survival through the traditional forms of social organisation, communication and decision making. This became evident to Ansu-Kyeremeh and to many others during the 1980s and 1990s when there was a massive reduction of government and other services during the period of structural adjustment. There was growing awareness that up to 70 or 80 per cent of the people in most African countries are fending for themselves, with little or no assistance from the government or other NGOs, in the 'informal economy' outside of the formal financial and marketing system. Ansu-Kyeremeh
became increasingly aware that people were carrying forward their cooperative survival tactics largely through the traditional forms of organisation, communication and decision making which existed before the imposition of the colonial centrifugal structure. The people could survive because they were bringing into play their indigenous knowledge and incorporating from the modernisation influences what 'worked' within their traditional forms of economy.

The evidence of the importance of traditional organisation and communication in the lives of the people led Ansu-Kyeremeh to carry out a detailed study of the intra-village communication among the Bono people of central western Ghana. He discovered that the ordinary villager was a member of a great many formal and informal groups for virtually every life function. The effectiveness of group action was due to the fact that every villager, young and old, had the opportunity to voice his or opinion about every cooperative action in the village. This meant that everyone was drawn into the discussion, planning and motivation to carry projects to a successful conclusion. Group decisions were further ratified by traditional village leaders whose main function was to 'listen' to what people wanted to do and to give those intentions the stamp of authority. This constituted what Ansu-Kyeremeh described as 'centripetal communication', beginning from the people and articulated up into community action. The enthusiasm of the people for these participatory projects, in his view, contrasted sharply with the listless disinterest for projects initiated by extension agents representing the 'centrifugal communication' coming from central government.

Ansu-Kyeremeh also discovered the remnants of a broader pre-colonial regional political system of the Bono people that coordinated the decisions of the villages in effective regional action. 'Communication and information which flow within centripetal indigenous political system worked so well in the past that the British colonial administrators described it as "a democratic government to a degree of which there is not any modern parallel in Europe"' (Ansu-Kyeremeh, 2005: 184, citing Maxwell, 1928: 34). The visible elements of this traditional centripetal system of communication were largely dismantled by the British colonial control structure in spite of their expressed admiration. Nevertheless, Ansu-Kyeremeh believes that the traditions of cooperative group action at the local and the articulations of initiatives from the village to the district and regional level remain alive and can be revitalised if the people are given the freedom and support to develop them. This is brought out in the article of Festus Tarawalie in this issue of African Communication Research.

Communalisation

The emphasis on the village or neighbourhood as the most important and effective site of communication derives from the observation that African life tends to be very socially interactive, probably more so than in other cultures of the world. The obligation in Africa to support the family, clan or village over individual aspirations is well known. The socialisation and personal identity of Africans are said to be much more linked to intimate social groupings. One waits to see what the
community, especially the authority in the community, wants before making a personal option. Many African philosophers see communalism as a central African value, and many communication scholars argue that Africans see good communication not in terms of the effects it can have on an individual or as a means to express one's personal identity, but in terms of the capacity to build bonds of solidarity and the integration of the individual into the group (Ugboajah, 1985; Moemeka, 1997, 1998; Faniran, 2008).

Ansu-Kyeremeh thinks that the model of mass communication, the transmission from one point to individuals alone, must be 'communalised'. Typically people in Africa watch television or home video in groups and they talk about media in groups. The news may come to an individual and then the individual spreads the news within the community through oral networks. Ansu-Kyeremeh is thinking of the dense infrastructure of groups in the typical African village or neighbourhood. Groups for him are traditional aspects of village social structure, the family, age-groups and cooperative action groups that people are socialised into. The rites of passage are successive stages of group integration, and the emotional high points of life are not individual success but the rituals of village celebration with music, dance and group singing. Communication in this context is largely singing, dancing, speaking with rhetorical effect, the rhythmic cadence of words and proverbs, and story-telling. All communication should build on this network of oral communication.

Ansu-Kyeremeh (1997: 105) believes strongly that development efforts should not try to introduce new structures of communication but build on the existing patterns of communication in communities, especially the ongoing systems of interaction and personal relationships. All educational efforts should be based on a study of the existing communication channels in a community. It is this communal communication which is the strong basis of the centripetal structure of communication in Africa.

**Indigenisation of communication**

For Ansu-Kyeremeh indigenisation means that the norm of all good communication is what is considered good communication in African cultures. For example, good communication is not just the expression of personal opinion, but what builds solidarity in a group. Communication in African contexts has much more of a ritual respect for the persons involved, especially for those who have been endowed with authority or who are considered elders.

Joy Morrison, in her chapter in Ansu-Kyeremeh's edited collection (2005), has a particularly good description of the cultural characteristics of African communication. Her characterisations may be more typical of Burkina-Faso, but she would argue that they are the communication culture found to some degree throughout Africa. Words in the African context have power and have a kind of sacred sense about them. She stresses that good communication in Africa is performative, that is, it projects a mood and atmosphere in a group, and she cites the view that all Africans learn to perform with some degree of proficiency (Stone,
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1986). To be part of a community is to know about singing, dance, drama, storytelling, good rhetorical speaking, the effective use of proverbs. All communication is expected to teach, to communicate community values and to honor people in the group. The art of 'palaver', rhythmic discussion, is highly prized.

In this view, African styles of communication are not just incidental, but incorporate fundamental cultural values. To lose these styles would mean ceasing to be African and losing something very valuable in the panorama of cultural diversity in the world.

Mediated communication in Africa should adapt to this. Indigenisation is not Africanisation. To Africanise communication is not simply to incorporate Western communication styles into African contexts as, for example, when Africans took over the positions in colonial or newly independent states. Nor is indigenisation a form of hybridisation in the sense of somehow adapting African styles of communication to the Western mass media forms.

'Sankofa' or promoting a renaissance of African communication

A vision and policy of sankofa, that is, policy which enables the indigenous African forms of communication to develop in a holistic way is at the heart of Ansu-Kyeremeh's proposal of indigenisation (1997: 77-80).

Although he is somewhat defensive and a bit despairing that this might be possible, in fact this is now becoming the dominant paradigm for communication, at least in areas which touch upon rural development such as agriculture, health, and, interestingly, tourism.

The central premise is that forms of indigenous communication which are briefly described above are, in various ways, alive and active in the culture, in the personalities of the major actors in communities. The premise is that the people, especially in rural communities, know these forms of communication as 'local knowledge' and feel more competent in this than in the use of new technologies.

As is brought out in various articles in this issue, it is important that development actions open a space of freedom and encouragement to allow the people to choose the forms of organisation and communication that they prefer. Tarawalie, in his article on blending, states that when the FAO People's Participation Programme allowed the people the freedom to choose the kind of organisations they felt most competent in, most chose the traditional forms of organisation, type of projects and communication. What is most significant is that these were the most successful and sustainable programmes because the people felt they understood what was to be done and that they truly owned them as their own.

A further important point is that the truly indigenous is never a static institution but is continually evolving and incorporating new elements. As Ansu-Kyeremeh stresses, the indigenous which has roots in the traditional must be the norm, but that is seldom a question if the people have the choice. There is a striking pride in regional, tribal and African identity in the leadership in grassroots communities. As Uwah points out in his article, when the young people were given the possibility to organize festivals of more traditional communication in Eastern Nigeria, they
enthusiastically took this up. In Zambia, the income generating projects of the PPP used the traditional, indigenous forms of organization and communication, but the people recognised some of the deficiencies of this and asked outside advisors to help them formalise certain safeguards to improve them. The important thing is that this was done through a process of participatory discussion and planning and the decision to ask for outside help came from the people themselves. The opening of a space for free discussion enabled the local people to become more conscious of their own cultural heritage and the people never lost control of the process.

One of the greatest obstacles is that the universities of Africa, on the whole, do not understand the importance of indigenous communication and have little expertise in this. The university planning commission in Nigeria has apparently established traditional communication as one aspect which should be taught, but this is not present in many countries. Most graduates in communication have virtually no introduction and no idea of the nature and importance of indigenous communication and its role in the process of national development.

Finally, there has to be a conscious and consistent public policy of sankofa. This rejuvenation of indigenous African cultural practices may be popular practice, but the centrifugal central control system is extremely strong in most African countries. It may not be wise to establish certain practices as 'indigenous' and then impose these on the people. That was one of the mistakes of the 'ujamaa' policy in Tanzania. The government and other agencies must open a space of freedom for the local people to decide what they want to do in a given locality and encourage a participatory process of discussion and decision making.

2. The continued vitality of indigenous communication in Africa


Rather than dying out there is considerable evidence that traditional indigenous communication may be growing in importance, especially in development programmes that are seeking more participation and commitment. Marie Riley describes how a health campaign in Ghana incorporated ritual, singing, dance and 'forum drama' to gain the commitment of women to vaccination and other health practice. As we have noted above, drama, singing and dance are not 'shows' for the public, but are expected to be participated in by all present. Meetings typically began with a sacred ritual, like a prayer, to invoke the divinity but also the ancestors to give this lesson a moral dimension and link these activities to the obligation to continue the values of this community. Meetings and instructions that dealt with issues that could have some resistance such as family planning which depend on the husbands'...
cooperation were often carried out as dramas inviting audience participation. Putting issues such as family planning in a dramatic format lowered thresholds of resistance, encouraged all to explore these possibilities, and invited, alternative views.

Creating a self-understanding and a social understanding of the central role of women's identity in development is important (Rosander, 1997), and research on the role of traditional media in creating this identity is an area of much needed research (Mlama, 1994).

Creating a space for women's identity in the African nation

Helen Nabasuta Mugambimbi's study of women's organisations in villages of Uganda used an interesting methodology to reveal the changing culture and world view of rural women. The women's groups quite spontaneously used the indigenous forms of singing, dance and drama as a central form of communication. Given the participatory nature of these media and the traditional freedom to improvise the content and formats with one's own ideas, these media enabled the women to rethink their roles in their families and communities. The study followed the evolution of the songs, drama and dances created by the women of the Buganda region in their women's club activities and shows how they are a medium that allows a great deal of participatory creativity for social change.

The women's clubs were originally organised in the late 1950s and 1960s to provide an opportunity for women to gain literacy skills. This was a response to the gender inequalities caused by the preference of education of boys in the British colonial system. This is but another example of how the colonial centrifugal socio-political structure created concentration of social power, in this case, reinforcing the gender hierarchies. In various ways, however, the women's clubs opened a space of freedom for the women to take initiatives to affirm their own role in the domestic space of the home and then in the community and nation. It is one more example of the centripetal expansion of the indigenous culture from the grassroots when the opportunity is offered.

The women's clubs were another case of opening a space of freedom for a subordinate group because the women had to obtain permission from their husbands to attend meetings. Some men would not give permission because they feared it would be a threat to the traditionally ascribed male authority in the household. Most men, however, saw it as a harmless way to allow wives to become more skilled homemakers and improve the homemaking capacities of the women. In fact, the clubs focused on child nutrition, food preparation, gardening skills and home improvement and, while pleasing to the husbands, also increased the power of the women in the domestic space.

The gathering of women in the villages for work together was part of traditional village life and continued their traditional indigenous singing during work as part of their club activities. Women had always used their gatherings to introduce variations in the songs or dances and now in the clubs there was a quite strong development of singing themes. Soon, the creation of new songs, dances and drama became a focus of club activities in itself and competitions of singing, dancing, drama became part
of the festivals and fairs in which the different clubs presented their innovations in their home improvement practices. The style of singing maintained indigenous traditions, and the texts of song and drama worked with many of the traditional, themes and myths of the Buganda people.

In her report of one of these festivals Helen Nabasuga Mugambi notes the relation between the new confidence that the women gained in the improved homemaking practices, the increased power in the domestic space, the changing consciousness of the women regarding themselves and the changing texts of the songs. Many of the songs and dramas presented in the festival were a reworking of traditional Buganda myths that provide explanations of the roles and relative power of men and women.

Many of the songs celebrated the new income-generating activities that the women's organisation had encouraged, and the fact that this income gave the women greater power over decisions in favour of children's education and other aspects of family welfare. 'It is women's labour and creativity that brings health and development to the household', was the chorus of one of the songs. One of the main interests of the women in the clubs was entry into the informal economy to supplement the weak and failing incomes of husbands. The informal economy, which has little support from the centrally controlled official economy, emerges largely from the indigenous traditional knowledge and capacities. As in the case of these Ugandan women, a significant part of the informal economy of African nations is due to the ingenuity of women.

Many of the texts of the songs and the dramas revealed the awareness of the expansion of the women's indigenous knowledge and creativity out onto the national stage. One song, entitled ‘We the mothers of the nation’ celebrated, as the basis of the development of the nation, their work in agriculture, in energy-saving ovens, use of traditional medical practices and the introduction of an ideal homestead. An important point in the songs was the insistence that women's domestic work and gardening with the hoe, generally considered demeaning in contemporary African culture, was just as important and dignified as any work in the nation. The women were particularly proud of the fact that they had done all of this with very little help from any government or NGO agencies.

3. The classification of the variety of instruments of traditional media


The instruments used in traditional, indigenous media of communication in Africa - drums, horns, woodblocks, bells, and gongs - are of great communication and cultural significance because each instrument has a quite highly developed language of its own. These are part of the normal communication in villages, but are also a part of the communication in many other contexts of public gatherings in Africa. For those who have grown up in a particular African culture, the sound of a
Ten major lines of research on grassroots, participatory communication in Africa

particular kind of drum, played in a particular way is a language signalling the meaning of the occasion and setting off a train of connotations and emotional resonances.

Des Wilson’s research on the traditional media has become something of a model of classification putting order in our understanding of the immensely diverse use of these kind of instruments. This kind of classification may be the stock-in-trade of folklore and popular culture researchers, but Des Wilson has brought this into the field of communication research. His research is most pertinent for Nigeria and southeast Nigeria in particular, but the way he sets up the classification is valuable for research on traditional, indigenous media throughout Africa.

The classification entails the following:

(1) Identification of the various kinds of instruments used. His classification includes

'Idiophonic' or self-sounding instruments: drums, metal gongs, woodblocks, wooden drum, bells and rattles.

'Aerophonic', sound produced by the vibration of a column of air: ivory horns, wooden flutes, the deer horn.

'Membrophonic', the vibrations from leather stretched over an empty space and beaten by hand or stick.

'Symbolographic writing, cryptic representation on an absorbing surface.

'Demonstrative communication' Music, storytelling, rhetoric, use of proverbs, etc.

'Iconographic communication' Objects such as the kola nut, floral arrangements, palm fronds.

'Visual', especially colour symbolisms and colour combinations.

'Institutional', that is, the symbolic connotations of chieftaincy, secret societies, shrines, masks and masquerades, but also rites of passage such as name giving and marriage.

'Extra-mundane', that is, sensitivity to the communication not visible to others. In the African context this is a major form of communication, and guides important events in personal and public life.

(2) A description of how the medium (sound, pictorial, etc.) is made from the instrument.
The occasions on which it is used and the purpose for which it is used. For example, in the case of drums, among the Ibibio people, the obodom is used to call specific individuals or the whole community to the chief’s home.

The code language of the instrument. For example, the language of the obodom ubong is based on the tonal patterns of the local language and is understood by those who have grown up in that culture. In some cases, the language is designed to be understood by only an initiated few.

The social connotation. The obodom ubong (royal drum) is used on the occasion of the installation of tribal and clan kings, royal celebrations and the death of kings.

The symbolic connotation:

Among the Ibibio people, the frequent use of the obodom in moments of emergency has given it the symbolic connotation of grave danger. All of these media are present especially in more ritual contexts and in contexts where the communicators want to link those present with more traditional memories. In rural communities, where there is a stronger continuity with the history of the locality and where there the modern media may not be accessible because of the poverty of the people, the traditional media are of greater importance.

4. Popular art as grassroots, participatory communication in Africa


Ansuh-Kyeremeh’s conception of grassroots communication is based more on the material conditions of rural communities, subsistence agriculture and the social structures of traditional pre-colonial society. Another dimension of indigenous communication is the popular culture of the huge urban conglomerates such as Lagos, Kinshasa and Nairobi and the now increasingly urbanised rural areas. This is the world where the informal economy defines the material conditions of cultural production and life is more sharply divided between work and leisure. The leisure time communication is very much structured around the popular arts of Africa: home video, television, and radio with genres of entertainment that have their roots in the popular theatre, local music and popular novels of the recent past. This popular communication is framed in the cultural memory of the many local language regions of Africa: Yoruba, Akan, Swahili, Zulu to mention but a tiny fraction.

Karin Barber's studies of Yoruba popular culture are particularly interesting from the perspective of her research methodology. She reveals something of the
'centripetal process' in tracing the evolution of Yoruba popular theatre from the popular entertainment of Yoruba villages and the underclasses of colonial Lagos, to the Nigerian post-independence era when more than one hundred little theatre troupes travelled from village to village in Yoruba land, to the transformation of live theatre into television and home video. One begins to get an idea of how the regional and national cultures of Africa are emerging from the poor and marginal peoples. In Barber's analysis the popular arts of the Yoruba evolved out of the values and aspirations of people struggling in the informal economy of the densely populated southwest of Nigeria - poor traders, servants of the middle classes, artisans, taxi drivers - some still linked to agricultural villages and others attracted to the towns by Nigeria's petro Naira boom. The actors in the theatre troupes were often just as jobless and poor as their audiences and the leaders of troupes such as the Oyin Adejobi group she studies in detail were people who thrived on the whistling, shouting audiences in village squares and tumbledown halls of small Yoruba towns.

Barber's analysis opens to view the same tensions between the power of Westernised elites of Africa and what she calls the 'intermediate sectors' of poor but upwardly aspiring Nigerians. The intellectual avant-garde in universities on the whole 'despised the popular theatre for its vulgarity and lack of social or political “radicalism”. Though modern, this (popular) theatre had little in common with the 'art' theatre of the universities which was usually scripted and in English' (Barber, 2000: 3). The popular theatre was more defined by what it was not: not like modern European literature, not like the treasured, ancient traditional heritage, not the conscientisation and development theatre spearheaded by a university-based intelligentsia and much described by scholars in Europe and America. It received virtually no official recognition and was never lionised as was the economically successful home video industry - even though it clearly developed the tastes of the public for the now enormously successful home video boom.

'This theatre was oriented toward the ethos of school, church, progress and literacy and was dedicated to the transmission of “lessons”' (Barber, 2000: 3). The typical hero was the poor boy, simple and sincere, who was successful through honest hard work and a lucky 'destiny'. The dialogue was a weaving together of traditional proverbs that the young mostly male audience knew from their elders. There was much gentle lampooning of the Westernising clerks who liked to sprinkle English words in their dialogue, showed fastidious cleanliness, continually criticised Yoruba rowdiness and dreamed of going to university. Villains were often the flamboyant, arrogant rich who beat women, neglected parents and mistreated the elders. In the end the basic aspiration of the heroes is achieving the security of steady income and honor in life.

The popular theatre that flourished between the 1960s and the late 1980s (when the new video technology made home video production easy and profitable) was essentially an oral form. The troupe leader would get an idea, describe it to the producer who in turn described it to the actors to work out in rehearsals. If the audience was responsive a two-hour drama might easily go beyond three hours with actors heaping up the boisterous action. The early plays were really sung operettas, revealing the origins in choirs of the colonial era. Actors drew out the artistic beauty and expressive potential of the Yoruba language with a spate of rapid-fire back-and-
forth repartee that could last twenty minutes. Some of the ideas came from popular novels of the time, some from traditional folklore stories, some from stories handed down in their families, some from real life experiences that had a sharp and appropriate lesson for the audiences. The evil of marital intrigues was interwoven in most plots, but was certainly titillating to audiences.

Almost all of the plays drew heavily on Yoruba mythology, folklore and life at the kingly courts of the many royal families. Spirits abounded, and heroes often got magical powers in the sacred forests.

What Karin Barber brings out particularly well is the role of Yoruba popular theatre in articulating the aspirations and values of the emerging ‘intermediate class’ which today makes up the great majority of Africans and reflects back to them their cultural identity. There is much of the methodology of E.P. Thompson (1963) and Richard Hoggart (1957) which was the foundation of British cultural studies. What Thompson and Hoggart showed was that the popular literature that elites in Britain condemned as ‘bad taste’ enabled the British working class to affirm the validity of their cultural identity as an important part of the nation. There are also great similarities with the methodology of Martin-Barbero (1993) who analysed how the telenovela of Latin America is articulating the culture of the 'intermediate' classes of that continent and enabling them to affirm their importance in the national culture. It is an art form which resonated with the feelings of the people and gave them a sense of empowerment.

Likewise, in Nigeria the plays of the travelling theatre groups became in the 1980s the immensely popular television programmes and then the basis of the video film industry.

The ‘intermediate classes’ could now feel that they are part of the Nigerian nation.

5. The demise of the ‘extension model’ of development communication


In no part of the field of development communication has the switch to the grassroots, participatory paradigm been more radical and complete than in the thinking about how to communicate improved technology to farmers. The extension model, that is, the system of ‘extending’ new technology from the research plots of agricultural universities out to farmers through district extension agents, was the unquestioned prototype of development communication in the foundational era of development studies. The theory of diffusion of innovations of Everett Rogers and the Shannon-Weaver model of communication seemed to provide a strong theoretical foundation. The extension model apparently had proved its effectiveness in the striking rises in agricultural production in Europe and America. The regional agricultural research institutes applying the principles of genetics to local seed varieties were producing the ‘green revolution’ with the miracle rice, wheat, maize and all other major food staples.
The extension model was an integral part of the modernisation paradigm which hoped to raise productivity in developing countries by rapid transfer of technology from the First to the Third worlds. In most of the new nations in Africa in the 1960s the vast majority of productive workers were peasant farmers, and improving agricultural productivity was central to efforts toward capitalisation and paying the bill of modernisation. What the extension model did not take into consideration was that colonial governments had not developed the basic institutions to provide the credit and other supports to peasant agriculture nor had they developed the communication and transportation system to market the products of peasant farmers. Moreover the logic of the post-colonial political institutions favoured the bureaucratic governing elite and did not respond to the needs of the rural areas. Agricultural productivity has fallen steadily in many African countries, and most African countries have become net importers of food consumption needs.

Even if African peasant farmers would have had good prices and good marketing facilities to motivate them to increase production – which they did not – the extension model as a communication system was faulty. The extension system depended largely on visits of professionally trained (and professionally paid!) agronomists to individual innovative farmers. The extension system was originally designed in the United States to serve larger commercial farmers. The peasant farmer of Africa is important for national food production, but an agricultural technical service for semi-subsistence peasant farming requires quite a different approach. Africa would never have enough trained agronomists to reach the millions of small farmers and would never have the funds to pay professional extension agents. Unfortunately, the administrators of the extension system rarely learned to work with groups of small farmers, and governments have been slow to encourage the autonomous organisation of peasant farmers.

The classical model of extending the technical knowledge of the research centres and agricultural universities might be applicable to larger commercial farmers, but not to the small semi-subsistence cultivators who are the basis of agricultural production in Africa. Many African countries began the development process after independence with the belief that the increased production of the small farmer would generate a major part of the capital for national development. Instead, the failure to increase the productivity of the small-farmer sector remains the root of poverty and a huge wealth divide that increasingly afflicts most African countries. The ‘farmer-first’ school of thought argues that in Africa, with some notable exceptions, the fault lies mainly with the governing elite: the present systems of agricultural universities, government development planners, the agricultural extension bureaucracies, and the schools of communication in African universities.

The fundamental problem is the communication model used. Most of the agricultural development programmes began in the national planning offices which would develop goals of increased agricultural production and the introduction of new crop varieties. These goals were passed to the agricultural extension bureaucracies, and these bureaucracies would pass down orders to extension agents to persuade farmers to meet the government’s goals. This was the classic centrifugal model of communication that Ansu-Kyeremeh refers to. The effects model of communication assumed that peasant farmers were passive and attached to traditional ways, an
innovative vacuum, and that farmers had to be persuaded to accept the technological package of new seed varieties along with fertilizers and other expensive inputs. There was relatively little understanding of how complex semi-subsistence farming systems are and how many risk factors have to be considered in the introduction of the smallest modification. The knowledge and preferences of the farmers themselves were rarely considered. Needless to say, these production campaigns were almost always a failure. Usually, the farmers were blamed for their resistance to new ideas, their inability to adapt their production systems or simply their laziness in new production methods.

By the 1980s the accumulated research – largely by cultural anthropologists who studied the culture of semi subsistence cultivators – showed that small farmers in Africa are continually analysing the factors of better production and are continually seeking information on how to improve production. A number of experimental projects with subsistence agriculture showed that by building on peasant farmers' existing knowledge and on the existing ways of introducing improved practices, agricultural production could be improved significantly. Out of this new perspective there has emerged a new model of communication. By the early 1990s a new paradigm of participatory communication for rural development had become widely accepted, at least by the leading thinkers in the field. The Farmer First and Beyond Farmer First books in the 1990s became almost canonical texts for development communication. It is worth sketching briefly the major dimensions of this new paradigm to pose the question: has this area of research progressed much in the last ten years?

**1) Building on the local knowledge of farmers**

The basic dimension of the farmer-first model is that the communication process must begin with the search for information by the farmers themselves. In fact, in the effort to survive, rural cultivators are always experimenting and searching for ways to increase productivity. Outside advisors need to be attentive to the initiatives of farmers themselves who know what their farming systems are capable of producing with the soils, climate, marketing possibilities and other factors they are aware of. The starting point of any attempt to provide outside technical advice or application of the controlled research must be the questions and problems posed by the farmers. In virtually all of the published reports of programmes with some success in introducing more productive farming methods, the method was a problem-solving approach, building on what the farmers were already doing and exploring with the farmers the various avenues of solutions. The solutions almost always involved a gradual rethinking of the whole farming system, and the farmers themselves worked out the solutions. In some cases, where farmers were fatalistic about finding solutions, the extension agent or, more often, a paraprofessional farmer-leader, might serve as a ‘catalyst’ discussion animator leading the group toward a definition of the problem and a more systematic search for a solution. Part of the role of the catalyst was to raise the hope that there are solutions to the problems they are facing and know how to go through the process of finding solutions.
(2) Communication among organised groups of small farmers

A second dimension of the communication model is that the most important flow of information is the horizontal exchange of ideas among farmers themselves. Usually there are already community organisations and networks of informal information exchange, but there is also a great deal of internal conflict and differences in power. Virtually all of the successful programmes included some training in conflict resolution, participatory decision making and accountability to the local people. The preferred method of communication in the groups is not the lecture by a professional representative, but a discussion among the members led by a local leader or outside catalyst with some skills in group animation in which members define their problems, exchange the information they have available and come to some consensus on what information they think would be most useful for them at this moment.

Some of the greatest obstacles to this kind of open, trusting information exchange in African rural communities are the patron-client dependency relations. Local political, religious, ethnic or economic leaders build their following by setting rural people against each other and presenting themselves as the people who can obtain solutions for them. With many adult males migrating for work, there may not be stable leadership. Yet residents do want solutions and they respond to outside catalysts who are able to introduce a sense of mutual respect and civil discussion. In these situations the desire to find some kind of solution usually leads to informal interaction and building ad hoc interdependence. Leadership that is ready to work to attain concrete goals more easily gains the consensus support of the people involved. Later this can develop into more formal organisations. The witness of groups that have improved their life situation through cooperation is a strong motive. Communication which leads away from a focus on power-seeking, self-interests and bureaucratic status – all features of the centrifugal communication structure that has its origins in the colonial, modernisation and centralised state institutions - helps to forge information exchange around practical solutions.

(3) Trained paraprofessionals and leadership living in the communities

The extension system tended to build a dependency on outside technological bureaucracies and the belief that outside information was superior. This downgraded the creativity and initiative of local people and devalued indigenous knowledge. The farmer-first communication paradigm seeks to strengthen local organisation, local information exchange and local creativity and initiative. The indigenous analysis of problems is much more likely to take into consideration the memory of the peculiar local soil or climate circumstances, what has or has not worked, the fine-tuning of local vocabulary and meanings, who is a particularly trustworthy repository of local knowledge and is much more likely to be holistic, that is, to fit well with every aspect of the local rhythm of life. The provision of information is done through the local leadership structure either by persons elected by the group who get the instruction necessary from professional agronomists or through local leaders residing in the
community who have received some training and can act as resident paraprofessionals. The peasant leaders or paraprofessionals often have greater knowledge of local conditions and risks than outside professionals and are better able to communicate with the local farmers. Working through local leadership not only multiplies the effectiveness of the few professionally trained personnel, but leaves the process of innovation to the initiatives of the local communities.

(4) On-the-farm experimentation

A fourth dimension is the development of the informal experimentation and testing of new methods that many farmers do on their own in Africa into a more systematic testing of new practices in the conditions of the local community before these are widely introduced among the local farmers. Often a seed variety or a particular soil preparation method that may do well in the conditions of the experimental grounds of the agricultural universities does not do so well in the local communities. Local farmers should test their own adaptations of recommended practices to adapt these to conditions in their local community. This information is then articulated up to professional extension agents through local leaders and paraprofessionals. Thus, the agricultural research process incorporates the farmers as the principle protagonists.

(5) Radio and print media coordinated with farmer questions

A fifth dimension of the communication process is a much more active use of radio and other media not as an extension of the lecture method but as an intercommunicator among farmers' groups. Radio has the advantage of being immediately present to listeners and of being inexpensive to broadcast and to receive. Radio broadcasts are very flexible to produce and with new mobile technologies can broadcast directly from the farmers groups. The basis of programming is not a set of lectures decided by outside specialists who may not be aware of what is actually going on at the moment in the farmers' production groups. Rather the communication must start with the questions and problems of the farmers or other groups in the audience and respond to these. If the programmes are dealing with agricultural production, they must follow the production cycle and deal with the typical problems and questions that are presented at that moment in the production cycle. An important role of the radio station is marketing news, availability of resources, new government legislation that may be important for them and any other information which affects the entrepreneurial decisions of small farmers. Much of the programming becomes an exchange among farmers groups regarding innovations, how they are dealing with particular problems and the successes they have had. One of the most important functions is to provide an open forum to discuss common problems of marketing, lack of farm-to-market roads, the lack of agro-industry processing, government policy and other issues that can involve all and raise the consciousness of all.
(6) Extension services as co-researchers and links with major research centres

The communication role of the professional extension agent continues to be important but is changed. The extension agent must become more than an information transfer agent from the agricultural research centres to the farmers and more than just a catalyst in the action of the farmer groups. The professional agronomist has more systematic training in analysing the causes and solutions to the problems the farmers are facing. The professional agronomist becomes a co-researcher with the farm groups. The professional agronomist also plays an important role in training paraprofessionals and in organising training courses for the leaders of the farmers' groups. The professional agronomist also brings the agricultural research centres more directly into contact with problems and ongoing experimentation in the farmer group.

(7) Developing farmer-controlled NGOs that negotiate with marketing and resource agencies

Still another dimension of communication is the linking together of local groups at the district, regional and national levels. Most of the major problems of small farmers such as marketing, credit, agro-industry processing, an ongoing commitment, national price-support policy, farm to market transport, finding international markets and many similar problems can only be solved at a broader regional and national level. The problem is that farmers have not had any voice in how these problems are solved. There are no accountability procedures on the part of government. Policies are established for farmers in the interests of the governing elites with continual disastrous results for the farmer producers. The participatory structure enables farmers to voice in their local groups how they think these problems can be solved and then through elected representatives articulate their views up to the regional and national level. This is a structure that makes possible the centripetal process of communication that Ansu-Kyeremeh speaks of.

(8) Recognition of the central role of women in agricultural production

Much of the smaller semi-subsistence, peasant farming that provides the domestic consumption needs is carried out by women. In the new model of farmer control women are accorded a central role in training, experimentation and direction of farm organisations (Bryceson, 1995; Verma, 2001).

6. Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM)

The CBNRM movement is one case of more decentralised, local participatory governance that is gaining political and institutionalised acceptance in Africa. Although there has been considerable discussion of environmental planning at the policy level in Africa (Salih and Tedla, 1999; Keeley and Scoones, 2003) and some discussion of the ethics of environment (Msafiri, 2007), another important area of analysis is how this is being carried out at the grassroots level. The colonial view of the indigenous people as ignorant poachers gradually disappeared with the awareness that local communities have traditional knowledge and a spirituality of protecting the ecological harmony of their homelands. Independence governments found that they did not have the personnel or funds to maintain close supervision. Many local groups began movements to recover their land and resources, and the spread of common property theory legitimated the claims of these movements. The development of tourism, the conservation of wildlife and proved to be a source of livelihood for local people. Political leaders gained support by concessions to local leadership.

The local community management of forestry use, wildlife conservation and maintenance of the delicate biodiversity of ecological systems generally proved more efficient and successful than the centralised state management. The perennial conflicts between local people seeking livelihoods from forests or wildlife, expanding commercial farming, game hunters and tourist interests and domineering government officials have subsided once management rights are ceded to locally elected leadership. The world-wide movements to protect ecological balance and interdependent biodiversity included the rights of local communities as part of their demands, and most African countries became signatories to conventions and treaties that protected CBNRM. International tourism was as much attracted by meeting local people and their explanation of the meaning of their habitat for them as the contact with the beauty of the African natural world. Many NGOs found a role in helping traditional leadership learn new management skills. In short, the decentralisation of natural resource management to local communities seems to be a case of win-win for all interested parties.

In fact, the problems with CBNRM lie in the area of communication. Most communities remain very poor because they do not have the skills or support to develop the economic potential of the natural resources. It would be necessary to form communication linkages among communities to get the investment, markets and training needed for serious economic development. The most successful community management is carried out by smaller units in which there is face-to-face interaction and full consensus on decisions, especially distribution of financial benefits, with full accountability of leadership to the people in the community. Most of the conflict and breakdown of management was caused by continued connection of government officials or private entrepreneurs with a privileged sector of the community. There needs to be much more training of outside government and NGO officials in how to be a catalyst and promoter of participatory local action in a way that does not instrumentalise local management organisations for state purposes but increases the autonomy and complete self-governing capacity of local groups.

The most valuable asset of the community is the traditional knowledge of
wildlife and other resources, but this needs to be conveyed to the young of the community by ritualistic performative communication and the integration of broader knowledge of conservation by youth and women’s organizations. In general, the rationalistic deliberation over economic and technical issues is not the typical African mode of deliberation. Community is built through drama, dance, choral singing, traditional rhetoric and colourful display in connection with the contemporary institutions of education, the school, the local churches, and community improvement.

In Africa everybody comes back to the home village and reintegrates the urban with the local at the times of ritual celebration of marriages, funerals or other rites of passage. The singers at these celebrations are skilled in linking the old and the new. The case of the women’s organisations in Uganda illustrates how traditional singing, drama, proverbs and poetry can use world views to deal with contemporary and new issues. Community radio has also been successful in some parts of Africa in setting in motion a communication and debate process which integrates traditional knowledge with new knowledge to deal with contemporary problems and lack of community consensus. Performative communication in storytelling, drama, dance and rituals emphasizes that every community has its own unique history, its own problem-solving resources, and has its unique way of dealing with local issues.

7. Community communication for survival in poverty


Still another important line of research on grassroots participatory communication began in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the crisis of rural poverty that followed structural adjustment programmes, historic droughts and creeping desertification and increasing population pressures in many African countries. In the 1970s, many African governments, with the burst of development efforts following independence, had raised the expectations of rural communities with assistance in building schools, dispensaries, roads and other assistance.

By the 1980s, however, the governments were far overextended and could not continue earlier development efforts, especially in rural areas. With the increase of government bureaucracies and the demands of the political patronage systems, public expenditure was increasingly directed toward an urban middle class. The government agricultural marketing systems were very inefficient, but rural people found markets and some monetary income in the growing regional and district towns. There was increasing education in rural areas and a growing rural leadership of somewhat better off peasant farmers, small businesses, teachers and government employees. From the late 1980s on, young university educated graduates who could not or would not work in government, formed NGOs to help the rural poor and many donor agencies preferred to work with these NGOs.

Left to themselves many rural communities began to activate traditional communal practices of working together, but with many new ideas of community
development and community organisation that were spreading in rural areas. The studies of organized community development efforts, collected by Fraser and Mackenzie, document the growing presence of local organisations. A major motivation is to continue the process of improving health and education and get access to simple modern appliances such as transistor radios. Village leaders often lead the way in building schools and dispensaries with volunteer work and some contributions of the communities. During periods of drought, communities dig wells and build small dams.

Small saving and loan associations are helpful in paying school fees, getting medicines, or buying batteries for radios and electric torches or other simple appliances. Groups of peasant farmers buy old lorries to transport their produce to local markets. Women form communal gardening projects to raise and sell fruit and vegetables in the markets or on the streets. Women also worked together to produce some income in brewing local beer, milling maize and millet flour, tailoring, local crafts making baskets, pots and other household items or maintain small retail stores. The traditional burial societies continue to multiply. Young men use local blacksmith skills to make hoes, knives, charcoal stoves, buckets and cooking utensils. Men are involved in cooperative livestock and charcoal production and sales. Churches were moving from a clergy focus to a lay-directed group focus not only for religious prayer and reading but for community action. Tree planting, water harvesting and other resource conservation projects are often communal efforts.

These organizations imply a process of communication for problem solving. Accompanying these community self-help organizations are many movements of group and community communication applying consciousness-raising discussion methods inspired by Paulo Freire. Virtually every African country has agencies promoting popular theatre as a way to foster community organizations, although this tends to be stronger in southern Africa. Most NGOs include training in participatory communication in their work with rural communities. Many of the churches have programmes of training in participatory communication. In rural communities and in many African countries churches are also establishing local educational radio stations which are attempting to support community organisations.

The question which Fraser and Mackensie and others pose is whether these local level organizations really represent the foundation of the kind of centripetal communication that Ansu-Kereyemeh would propose. All current studies suggest that the key to success of this process is the realisation of information and communication goals by all the actors involved, a win-win communication process:

1. The energy for upward communication comes from the initiatives of the people in the communities who get the information they need and can create sufficient communication to help all in the community to see how they will benefit from the action.
2. All stakeholders in the process – paraprofessional representatives of outside organizations, better-educated localites, or even professionally educated people residing in the community-must continually encourage the
community to see that the local problems are solvable. They must also stimulate community discussion or be ready to feed in new ideas from their communication with a world of ideas.

3. The development of local community 'survival organisations' involves district, regional and national level networking and coordinating bodieds led by people elected by local organisations and responsive to the local organisations. This pyramid of representatives are both horizontal communication linkages with the network of local organisations and vertical linkages to negotiate with national elites the resources for local communities. It is of crucial importance, however, that the major cultural, political and economic communication of these representatives is with the local people they represent and not with the national elites they are attempting to persuade to support the local people they represent.

4. Very important are permanent beneficent organizations at the regional level-professional associations, churches, local foundations, etc.-providing communication training, sustaining a broadcasting and print communication for local communities getting support from national or international organisations and translating local culture into a populist culture that makes local culture and knowledge the foundation of a national culture.

5. It involves government policy which forces its service bureaucracies out of the enclosure of their own internal communication (internal power struggles, etc.) and makes responsive communication exchange with the initiatives and requests of local organizations a priority.

6. Finally, it is important to have a process of dialogue between people's organisational networks and national governing elites and other major power holders which argues that allowing people's organisations to realize their goals is not a threat to their power. Rather, this dialogue argues that a pluralistic power structure (Gramsci's concept of hegemony) which negotiates the mutual benefits on all issues is for the benefit of all. A pluralistic power structure is ready to continually admit new social actors and continually reformulate conceptions of prestige, preferred cultural identity, and communicative symbols for the benefit of all. The national media are of crucial importance in forming a pluralistic, continually changing national cultural identity.

8. The movement for participatory local government in Africa


A particularly important effort toward a more participatory, centripetal process of social action in Africa is the movement for strong local government. The appeal for decentralised governance is a central aspect of the world wide response to the problems of the centralised state governance all over the postcolonial world and is included by many political scientists in what Huntington has called 'the third wave of democracy'. In this perspective, the first wave is constituted by the Eighteenth
Century movements in America, France, Latin America and other parts of the world to establish democratic constitutional governance, the second wave by the independence of the former colonies after World War II and the third wave by the movements particularly characteristic of Africa in the late 1980s and 1990s that brought multiparty regimes, freedom of the press, a more central role for the civil society, the downsizing of central government and a host of other political changes, including decentralisation of governance.

Since 1990, African governments have introduced three general types of decentralization (Tordoff, 2002):

**Decentration**, keeping control of all decisions in the central government but moves some administrative authority out to appointed bodies such as regional and district commissioners (Kenya and Cote d'Ivoire are cited as examples).

**Devolution**, allowing local areas to elect officials or representatives in local governing councils (political control) but often keeps control of the resources for local administration in the hands of central government (Uganda, Zambia and South Africa).

**Decentralisation**, giving local bodies varying degrees of political elective and accountability control and the administrative resources to carry out local collective decisions (Chad and Botswana).

Olowu and Wunsch point out that the desire and pressure for more local autonomy has always been present in African communities. In the early colonial period imperial governments were primarily interested in conquest and tight control and either brought local authority under their control through indirect rule or through the public security system of district and regional commissioners. After World War II the British colonial office, in part to reduce its own administrative expenses, introduced elected local councils with at least advisory responsibilities in education, health, rural roads and water supply and agricultural extension, with local tax support and with grants from the central government. Cooperatives and rural leadership training were also encouraged. Many of the independence leaders came out of this local government structure, but, ironically, these leaders moved to establish a strong centralised power structure and central planning command process which brought all local communities into dependence on the decisions of the leaders of the dominant political party.

There were many pressures on African states to decentralise and devolve administrative services and political decisions to the local level: the increasing local demands with rising educational and awareness levels, the isolation of the central government from the district and regional offices because of problems of communication and transportation, the lack of funds and administrative capacity of central governments to respond to local needs, and pressure from donors to stop the enormous growth of political appointees in central government bureaucracies (Pasteur, 1999). The structural adjustment reforms made decentralisation a condition for IMF and World Bank funding, largely to reduce the cost of central government,
but most leaders have paid only lip service to these conditions. In some cases, as in Uganda, Museveni built support for his movement against Obote by granting greater autonomy and participatory decision making to local communities that were suffering from the exploitation of local chiefs and other local political leaders. In Uganda, for example, the various levels of local government have responsibility for services such as education, health and especially local security, and a large percentage of local tax revenue is reserved for the local governments.

With the economic and political crises of the late 1980s, insightful African political leaders began to see that national development had to come from the grassroots initiatives of the people and that the major role of government is to encourage and assist those initiatives. Nyerere admitted in an interview published in 1984 in Third World Quarterly,

There are certain things I would not do if I were to start again. One of them is the abolition of local governments and the other was the disbanding of cooperatives. We were impatient and ignorant...We had these two useful instruments of participation and we got rid of them...These were two major mistakes (Nyerere, 1984: 828, Cited in Olowu and Wunch, 2004: 34).

The development of responsible local government has made little progress in Africa except where there has been an almost complete collapse of central government services as in the case of Chad. The dominant political parties maintain tight control of local administrative units to reward local political leaders with jobs and funding and to prevent significant political opposition. Local government is mostly a facade to respond to local ethnic and regional demands or donor agency pressures. The decision-making power of local government remains very limited. For example, in Ghana, local communities can elect representatives to a district council, but the funding and effective permissions are given exclusively to the district commissioner from the central government. African political leaders are extremely reluctant to give up their resources of jobs and funds for their patronage systems and local leaders want to continue their exclusive access to oil and mineral incomes or support of international donors through central governments.

The major problem, however, is the lack of local communication infrastructure to voice needs and make local governments accountable (Clayton, 1998). Increasingly, the national media operating in the national metropolitan city are making central governance more accountable through investigative reporting and continuous reporting on the efficiency of government response to problems. But this kind of media pressure generally does not exist at the district and regional level.

The problem of government without communication

   The detailed evaluations in the work of Olowu and Wunsch describing how local government is functioning in various African countries show that the problem is precisely a lack of communication infrastructure at the local level.

(1) Many African countries, such as the Ugandan case described in some detail, have conceded significant functions of local services to local communities and at the district (sub-county level) but, because there is so little discussion of village
community problems at the village level, community representatives come to district level decision-making with little knowledge of what the communities want or need. Community organisations are precisely a communication structure, but because community organisations are so weak with little management ability, they do little to facilitate articulation of community needs among local families and clans. Representatives tend to represent only their own immediate clan or group of friends. These representatives do not really have the mandate from the local community and, in the end, get little for the local community and do little to solve the local problems. The tendency to represent only their own immediate clan and to bring them resources causes much conflict in the community and makes community communication even more difficult.

(2) Many African countries are making 'poverty reduction', especially in rural areas, a major priority. Funds are being channelled out to poorer rural areas or to urban slums. The district-level government is the representative of the ministries in those areas and the resources are channelled to district-level administration. But because of the lack of communication at the district level, people in the villages often do not know about these resources or only those who have close political connections with the district get the information and these are not really in contact with the community as a whole. Usually, the use of resources to improve health or education facilities requires a certain level of community mobilisation, but without good communication, the resources available from the central government are not used at all or are used badly. The use of these finds requires a certain level of supervision and accountability, but with weak communication in the community and weak contacts between the district offices and communities, the resources are often wasted, projects are never completed and district level officers have little knowledge of what is going on.

(3) The national press in some African countries has been relatively effective. In some African countries community radio has succeeded in opening a space for wide discussion of community problems such as the irresponsibility of local teachers, the lack of proper hygiene and health measures in market areas, or the lack of response to malarial epidemics. Unfortunately, many African governments do not give the support necessary for effective community radio or even block this. Because of this there is little articulation of problems at the district and regional level and little demand for accountability of district and regional offices (Stren, 1989: 123-129).

(4) The major line of communication of local government in Africa is between the sectors in the district offices and their central ministerial offices in the national capital. In Uganda, which has a more developed structure of decentralisation of government, there are village council, councils at the level of what is called the parish and at the subcounty level, and councils at the district level. The subcounty has local taxing powers, but almost no money is levied. The plans are worked out in central offices and the proposals that might come up in the various council are not taken into consideration. More important, there is virtually no publicity given to the plans and budget allowances coming down from the central ministerial offices. In fact, district offices and their councils are generous in funding their own direct and indirect needs: salaries, sitting allowances, vehicles, etc. are provided for. (Wunch
and Ottemoeller, 2004). Little funding is left over for educational, health and other needs in the villages and wards, and there is no communication forum to discuss this.

(5) Citizens at the district and regional level are represented in the national assembly and some countries, such as Nigeria, have representatives at the state-level assembly. The vast majority of Africans have little knowledge of what their representatives in parliaments and in local and regional councils are doing, and given the lack of local media in Africa it is not possible for them to know.

The answer to most of these problems of information and accountability is to strengthen local media and to introduce a dimension of community service into all local media (Dwivedi, 2002). In the best models of community radio, for example, there is report of discussions and meetings in the local communities in the broadcasting area. There is a constant flow of information and discussion of issues in the community model of local media.

9. Evaluating the communication processes in community-based services

D. Glassman, Naidoo, J., Wood F. (Eds.). Community Schools in Africa: Reaching the Unreached.

In the face of the inability of central governments in Africa to provide basic education, health facilities and other services in local communities, the communities themselves have made efforts to set up and manage these services on their own. Significantly, community initiatives are most often found among the poorest, least educated and least politically integrated sectors in Africa. The book, Community Schools in Africa, provides an overview of the successes and problems of these locally controlled services in various countries of Africa, with a good insight into the communication research issues involved.

The community schools, like other similar services, are managed by a local leadership council, selected with some form of participatory election. The major resource for local and national development is the desire of the people for the services and the willingness to assume collective responsibility for this. The major communication problem is the accountability of this leadership to the people of the community both in the representation of the interests of all and making known to the people what the leadership is doing so that the community can control this in some way (Mushi, 2001). The leadership often is not accustomed to promoting wide participation, especially where taboos excluding women, youth and other marginal groups are influential. It is easy for leadership to favour their own families, friends and political alliances, with resulting bitter conflict.

In the best of cases the growth of community-based management of local services has been supported by leadership training programmes such as that of DELTA described below. From a communication perspective, the objective is to strengthen the existing traditional horizontal communication linkages that exist through lineage and marriage, cooperative action in agriculture and other forms of informal economy and the kind of informal interaction that Ansu-Kyeremeh and
others describe above. These horizontal linkages not only build solidarity and trust in the local community, but bring together communities for the exchange of ideas on planning and problem solving at the district and regional level. If there exist bonds of trust and easy communication, then accountability to the people flows naturally.

A second objective is to strengthen the vertical relationships of local communities with resource agencies that can help local schools or health facilities and with authorities that can provide legitimation of local decisions. When conflicts develop at the local level, there is a trusting and legalised relationship with authorities that can quickly resolve local conflicts and mismanagement.

10. Group communication for personal and social empowerment


A line of research of great importance for grassroots, participatory communication is the study of group communication for social transformation or, more commonly, for personal and social empowerment. It is clear that a participatory structure of communication can never hope to develop unless there is a basic redistribution of socio-political-economic power. The empowerment tradition argues that this redistribution of power must begin with new bonds of solidarity, common vision and determination among the people themselves. This usually begins as a social movement that gives up the hope of solving problems by appealing to the powerful through hierarchical bureaucratic and clientelistic communication structures and seeks a solution by building horizontal bonds of communication among themselves. The group communication for empowerment tradition seeks to facilitate the formation of popular movements by an education in communication for people's solidarity. Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educationist, is often referred to as the foundational theorist for this 'education for freedom and empowerment'. Freire explained the passivity and dependence of the poor and marginal as a result of a communication relation with elites that instilled in lower-status people the self-perception as socially, politically and culturally incompetent and that therefore they needed to depend on the elites for guidance. To maintain this vertical dependency, elites do all they can to prevent horizontal intercommunication among the powerless. A typical example of this was the attempt of the apartheid regime in South Africa to forbid all meetings among blacks. This dependency relationship is to be broken by opening a space of freedom for the poor and powerless to discover, in interpersonal discussion among themselves, the solutions to their problem in their own local knowledge and analytic capacities.

A major purpose of dialogical communication is to enable participants, who have a superficial attitude of dependency as a tactic of survival in a power structure, to get in contact with their own sense of critical perception deep in their personalities and raise this to the level of conscious affirmation and public contribution. By this
education in dialogical communication and mutual respect, participants grow in solidarity and capacity to form their own organisations to carry out their collective decisions. This is also a school of democratic deliberation because it asks participants in the discussions to give reasons for their proposals in terms of the common good of the group and to ask for reasons from others. It is a school in democratic leadership because discussions are guided by animators who do not impose their views but whose main objective is to enable everyone to make their contribution to the group action, all to listen to each other and move toward a course of action that the group feels is its solution.

This approach to group communication for personal, social, economic and political empowerment is radically different from the 'group dynamics' forms of group communication developed especially as part of organisational communication and industrial sociology. While group communication for empowerment has as its primary objective to gain independence from organisational power, group dynamics is a method of devolving organisational goals to the level of small group to enable organisational members to internalise and adhere to organisational goals. Group communication for empowerment aims at exactly the opposite: to gain independence from the organisational, bureaucratic occupation of the life space and to develop people-controlled initiatives from the grassroots.

What group communication for empowerment does is to build on the traditional forms of communication in the culture, but add to this (a) a problem-solving focus, (b) a more reasoned deliberative process, (c) the skill of dialogue and research which now is no longer the monopoly of the modernising elites, (d) moving discussion toward decision-making and organised action. What this attempts to do is to introduce the lower-status groups to the same skills that makes elites powerful, but now to use these skills for the common good rather than for exploitation.

Although Paulo Freire has had great influence throughout the world, Africa has its own tradition of group communication for freedom, expressed especially in popular theatre and other typically African forms of participatory group communication such as dance, singing and communitarian rituals. In fact, different forms of group communication for empowering grassroots social movements have emerged in myriad contexts over the last two hundred years in reaction to the power relations of capitalism, colonialism and postcolonialism and, ironically, in response to dictatorial communism.

In the African context group communication for empowerment has been more typical of efforts toward agricultural and rural development. The chapter by Cornwall, Guijt and Welbourn cited here is valuable because it brings together in comparative framework five or six of these approaches which are also quite common in Africa: farmer participatory research (FPR), rapid rural appraisal (RRA), participatory rural appraisal (PRA), participatory action research (PAR), Development Education and Leadership Teams in action (DELTA) – a uniquely African approach, and theatre for development, which, as we noted, is highly developed in Africa.
Participatory research

One of the most striking forms of popular empowerment is to make the poor and marginal the major protagonists of technical research in agriculture, health, education and other key areas of their lives. Technical research has always been thought of as something that is done by an intellectual, theoretical elite, at the top of the power elite in modern society, operating in the isolated conditions of the laboratory that allow scientists to separate out experimental factors from the concrete conditions. Participatory research argues that the most important aspect of technical control, whether it be a matter of agriculture, health or education, is the combination of a technical improvement with the immensely complex concrete life conditions of the people. It is assumed that only the poor can change their life situation and that the poor and powerless are constantly incorporating aspects of modern technology in terms of their existence in the informal economy. The local knowledge of the poor and marginal regarding their life situation is the framework for continually introducing improvements in their life, given the meager resources they have.

Participatory research introduces the usual group communication for empowerment methods of dialogical discussion led by a skilled group animator. The process not only enables each member to bring to the level of conscious appropriation his or her existing knowledge of agriculture, health or other problem areas but also enables the group to bring together the best knowledge of all of them to formulate a common project. In this case the group may have an experimental agricultural plot in the village or, in the case of health, a group discussing how best to deal with HIV/AIDS in their lives and in the village. Most often, in these more technical issues the group animator is often a paraprofessional in agriculture or health who is a native of the community. The paraprofessional has some training and is often in contact with extension agents and even the centres of regional and national research to obtain more information when the local group has formulated the question and defined the need for information in terms of their research. It is ideal when groups of this kind can form a network of information exchange, served by radio or other media with a more educational orientation, and the groups can become a self-governing NGO to negotiate from a position of some power with government ministries and other service agencies. Thus, the discussing, researching group is at the centre of a dialogue of a team of village leaders, paraprofessionals and professionals in the particular problem area and a much larger information-flow system (Chambers, 1993). The combined knowledge gives local people many more choices of information for solving local problems (Rhoades, 1983; 1990).

This is an empowering process because it introduces to the poor and the marginal the culture of research and sets them on the long, slow process of improving agriculture, health or other areas of life. They are equipped with the ability to continually incorporate new ideas into their ongoing local research process.

Participatory Rural Appraisal and Participatory Action Research
Ten major lines of research on grassroots, participatory communication in Africa

Rural development agencies have long done general, comprehensive assessment, as a basis for extension activities and annual budgets, of the state of the quality of life in rural communities touching all aspects from soil conservation, agricultural productivity and marketing to health and community organisations. Although this kind of general evaluation was always done with the help of the local farmers and their leaders, the local people rarely analysed the data or used the data for their own planning. With the application of the principles of group and community communication for empowerment, rapid rural appraisal evolved in the 1980s into Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). The difference is that now people of rural communities, not the agencies, define what information is to be sought and retain control of the information gathered as a basis of projects and activities that the village or district will introduce.

Whereas farmer or health participatory research tends to focus on one problem-solving process, PRA is a method that enables a community or district to take stock of every aspect of the quality of community life. This can be a powerful tool because it provides evidence for obtaining government or other resources for comprehensive development of the community or district. Where PRA has been introduced, the local population assumes much more responsibility for projects and does more long-term planning.

The introduction of relatively inexpensive, easy to use video cameras has, in the view of many, revolutionised PRA because it eliminates the need for written records and presents the state of the community much more dramatically and rhetorically (White, 2003). Whereas written records tended to become the property of rural elites, the video provided much more public and widely diffused information about the community. What people were thinking was not lost in the translation into summary statistics, but could be heard directly and then discussed publicly.

PRA is often accused of becoming a superficial method of gathering superficial data without addressing the deeper problems of social power. The use of the data assumes the presence of strong community organisations and strong participatory institutions. Many would say that Participatory Action Research is much more effective in mobilising the community in dealing with local power elites.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) becomes particularly important in situations where the rural and urban poor are considered culturally degraded and inherently inferior and this perception of inferiority is used as a weapon against the poor and leads the poor to think of themselves as inferior. Group communication for empowerment becomes a context for affirmation of the value of the folk culture, the folk forms of theatre and poetry, the validation of the popular culture as the authentic national culture in contrast to the tendency of the elites to imitate Western culture. PAR becomes the basis of a cultural revitalisation movement and the basis for a major socio-political movement to build a base of power and alliances to significant social change (Fals-Borda and Rahman, 1991).

DELTA (Development Education and Leadership Teams in Action)

DELTA can lay claim to being the purest adaptation of the Freirian method
and the most widely diffused use of the Freirian method in Africa. DELTA was developed in the 1970s in Kenya by Anne Hope and Sally Timmel, and their four-volume Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers (1995) is one of the most widely used manuals for rural community development in Africa. DELTA has operated in virtually all countries of Africa and recently held a continental congress in Nigeria.

Delta seeks to build solidarity and trust among grassroots organisations and enable these organisations to form district, regional and national networks. Delta places a great deal of emphasis on leadership training, management of people's organisations, capacity of the poor for social analysis and human rights.

**Theatre for Development**

Socio-drama and theatre are widely used as a much more actively involving means of group communication for empowerment, partly because in Africa it always involves singing, dance and ritual (Mavro, 1991). Drama tends to have a far greater emotional and imaginative impact than group discussion (Mda, 1993). Audiences enjoy this also and members of the audience actively join in the drama. The kind of group animation that DELTA or Participatory Action Research promotes is often too cerebral for the less-educated rural people. Theatre is particularly effective in dramatising the oppressive nature and cruelty of power relations. People see much more clearly how humanly destructive are the forms of authoritarian government and leadership in many parts of Africa. University departments of drama throughout Africa have actively promoted this. In some cases drama becomes a regular and welcome activity of youth clubs in rural areas of Africa. In many countries of Africa there are major centres for promoting and training rural development workers in forms of theatre for development.

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Research on traditional communication in Africa:  
The development and future directions

Des Wilson*

Abstract

The present article traces the development of research on traditional communication and media in the African context, outlines the major areas of this research currently being developed and introduces briefly the major researchers and their publications dealing with this topic. The author argues that traditional media and traditional forms of communication continue to be important in the life and culture of Africa, especially in the more rural areas.

Introduction

Communication research in Africa initially paid little attention to traditional communication. In the post-independence era after 1960, the modern press and broadcasting institutions were considered far more important in the new nation-building efforts and attracted virtually all research efforts. In the 1970s, however, research on traditional communication began to blossom, in part, because of the work of Lucian Pye (1963), Leonard Doob (1966) and William Hachten (1971) who pointed out that for the vast majority of Africans traditional communication was much more important than the press and broadcasting. Pye, for example, spoke of ‘indigenous communication systems’.

A strong impetus to research on traditional communication was given by Frank Ugboajah (1979: 1985), Nwnuneli (1981) and my own early work (1981). Particularly influential was Ugboajah’s concept of ‘oramedia’ which was widely published (1985). The collaborative efforts of the African Council for Communication Education (ACCE), *Africa Media Review*, and UNESCO in the early 1980s attracted considerable attention to debates about traditional media among African scholars. Some critics questioned its practical value-thinking that traditional culture was disappearing—but many African communication scholars were fascinated by this new direction in African communication research. In the 1980s the crisis of the modernisation model of development in Africa redirected interest among communication researchers and African intellectuals in general toward sources of nationalism and Africanism in traditional culture and communication.

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Initially, researchers focused on different aspects of traditional media. Georgette Wang and Wimal Dissanayake, from an Asian perspective (1984), and Kwasi Ansu-Kyeremeh (1988; 1992) were concerned more with the concept of ‘indigenous media’. Ugboajah (1972, 1979) saw traditional communication in terms of its oral, interpersonal characteristics. Nwuneli (1981) characterized traditional communication as informal and folk media. Gradually a certain consensus has emerged regarding the definition of the essential elements of traditional communication: (1) the different forms, instruments and social characteristics have their origin in the pre-colonial era but have adapted to the colonial and post-colonial influences; (2) it functions largely at the local community and district level; (3) it is largely oral and interpersonal or within the face-to-face ambit of the local community; (4) it uses traditional, indigenous instruments such as drums, gongs and other relatively simple media; (5) the message is highly symbolic and connotative of the history and context of the community; (6) the communication is closely interwoven into the structure of authority, religious cults, social structure and rites of passage.

African students of traditional communication have increasingly become aware that traditional media are present in virtually all other cultures of the world and that one can learn much from the research in other cultures. For many African communication researchers, however, trained in mass communication in Europe or America, the great importance of traditional communication even in the use of mass media is a relatively new discovery. Just as most Africans are educated in history from a European perspective and are relatively ignorant of the formal study of their own African past or formal pre-colonial history, so also the knowledge of the roots of contemporary communication in the past represents a new way of thinking. This new awareness of the traditional in the contemporary communication institutions gave birth to a pioneering team of African communication researchers who have begun to explore the history and continuities of traditional communication in present-day African communication. Thus, we have today a veritable avalanche of writing labeled traditional communication systems or other terms such as tra-dom-modern communication.

Much of this research has focused on identification of the different elements of traditional communication such as the five or six aspects listed above; the classification of these elements, for example, the classification of the different instruments used; the analysis of the socio-cultural functions of these forms in the structure of authority or the solidarity of the community; some initial theorising of this communication in terms of its integration in oral, ritualistic cultures; and pedagogy, how the young are socialised into traditional forms of communication.

There continues to be some confusion about the definition of what is traditional communication. Some African scholars have tended to follow European or American references to ‘traditional media’ as the earlier forms of mass media such as the press, radio and television in contrast to the new technologies such as Internet. Jennings Bryant (1993: 149), for example, writes of ‘traditional’ media as those technologies that have become a customary part of people’s lives. The fact that in Africa the formats of radio, newspapers, magazines, television and film have
emerged out of traditional media and exist side-by-side with traditional media makes a sharp division between traditional and modern difficult. For example, the video film industry in Nigeria and elsewhere emerged out of the traveling theatre troupes which, in turn, emerged out of traditional forms of dance, singing and storytelling. No Nigerian home video production would be complete without some of the cultism and even instrumental performance that has its roots in the pre-colonial culture. Radio, print media and video in Africa are, in many ways, closer to the forms of traditional communication than, for example, the new technology of Internet and the mobile phone. But then, we still have not done extensive research on the use of Internet and the mobile phone in the African context to see just how 'traditional' they are. Given the fact that the mobile phone is an oral medium, it may have taken on many of the aspects of orality of the traditional media in Africa.

Clearly, there is no one term which adequately describes or captures the dynamic development and change in communication activities in Africa. Every term tends to denote and connote a particular context or use and has its limitations to that. For example, the traditional newsman has inappropriately been referred to as the 'town crier', a familiar term in the literature on traditional media today. Liberians often refer to the traditional newsman as the 'town master' which, under closer scrutiny, does not appropriately describe what he or she does. Even Ugboajah's term, 'oramedia', which draws attention to the oral, face-to-face nature of traditional communication (1985), still excludes much of the non-oral symbols, icons, instruments and material objects that are implied even in his description of the traditional as oral communication.

For want of a more agreed-on definition, we have preferred the use of the term of 'traditional communication' referring to a rather eclectic mix of five or six commonly found elements that we have listed above. The list could obviously be expanded, but it does include most of the major elements indigenous to many parts of Africa that are referred to by researchers.

The Characteristics of Traditional Communication

Some analysis of traditional communication has been couched in terms of the familiar linear model of source, message, channel, receiver and effects. Some might argue that a less linear and more culturalist, ritual, communalist model would be more appropriate. The source-effects mode may place too much emphasis on the authoritarian structure of communities and may exclude attention on the more consultative, participatory, fluid nature of traditional communication that scholars such as Ansu-Kyeremeh sees as important (2005: 15-25). The linear model may exclude as many important aspects as it draws attention to, but it is an analytic structure that is used.

The source is usually seen to be the village or community leader acting alone or in concert with his council of chiefs or elders. This source is the authorising body for the outgoing communication. They represent the modern day editorial board of a newspaper or magazine. But they do not encode the message in the form in which it is delivered to the audience. This source discusses the details and leaves the rest
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to the traditional newsman whose role is often seen as that of a messenger. A messenger does not alter the content of a message but could embellish it with humour, anecdotes and examples, which enrich the picture intended. This task of the newsman is facilitated through the use of an instrument, which acts as an attention inviting or directing medium.

The message is a complex combination of verbal and nonverbal communication, which is translated by the traditional newsman, who is part of the agenda building process with the village council. In my article in *African Media Review* (1987) I tried to capture the significance of traditional communication message content by outlining this in terms of directives-instructions, announcements, news of events, deaths, upcoming events; advertising through physical display of goods, use of hawkers and vendors, use of fragrance/aroma, singing and drumming; public relations, conducted person-to-person or person-to-organisation; performances and announcements, entertainment and education, which is conducted formally and informally through cultural groups and membership in traditional societies.

The traditional newsman may use any of the musical or other instruments approved for communication purposes in a particular society. When he uses a gong he is called the 'gongman'. The preferred instrument varies from place to place. The Yoruba 'talking drum' is the preferred medium in most parts of Yorubaland in South West Nigeria. In an interview in the Nigerian Tribune newspaper in 2007, the Yoruba dramatist and scholar Akinwumi Ishola pointed out that: 'The talking drum is an important aspect of our culture that must be preserved. It plays an important role in Yorubaland. The drum serves as the voice of the people. The people use it to tell leaders to remember their promises and besides, it has entertainment and aesthetic functions. It is used in passing messages, telling stories and proverbs.'

In the African context, the channel is also the medium. The channel is both the medium and the instrument for getting a message across to the audience. It is also in the form of people, place, the agency of a human being (gongman) and other groups, which have principal and ancillary functions of getting the message out to the intended audience.

The venue where the communication event is taking place is also seen as a channel. In ordinary terms the channel refers to the physical means by which communication messages are conveyed either as signals, airwaves, venues or places where the media events take place. The term is sometimes used interchangeably to apply broadly to intermediate agencies that enable communication to take place. Thus speech, writing, gestures, facial expressions, mode of dressing, the performing arts or presentational media are all channels in this context.

The receiver (audience) of communication may be either individuals or groups depending on the nature of the message. If the message is venue-oriented, the venues could be the market, church, shrine, or village square. The message at times is directed to a rather restricted in-group such as cult organizations, to men or to women, or to members of a political following. The audience could also depend on the medium/channel type. Some communication networks may use a wooden gong, others a metal gong, others a skin drum, and others floral media. The audience,
obviously, may depend on message content, type, subject matter, purpose, style. Finally, the audience can be time-oriented where the period of delivery (morning/night) is important.

Nightingale (2003), however, sees the audience much more flexibly. At times the audience is made up of people specifically assembled or addressed by the source but the audience may also be people who just happen to encounter the message depending on the circumstances. Likewise traditional communication can differ greatly if the local authority has assembled a particular group or if the message is widely diffused to those in the community who may be interested. McQuail (2005: 399) corrects the notion that audience implies impersonal contact, anonymity and vastness of scale. Recent theory has led to the 'rediscovery of the audience as a group' with a personality. Much actual audience experience is personal, small scale and integrated into social life and familiar ways. This concept of audience reaffirms the interaction of members of the audience among themselves and audiences with the source. Virtually all traditional communication is ritualistic and brings the members of the audience into interaction with each other. There is little of the 'groupthink' or alienating isolation of members of the audience. Traditional communication is always activating the bonds of solidarity of the community based on kinship, relation to clan ancestors, long residence in a locality or other deep affective ties.

The effect desired in traditional communication may vary greatly according to the time of message delivery (for example, when there is an emergency in the community or area), the nature of the message (the urgency of informing affected groups) or how important the immediate response of the people may be. At its best, the major goal of traditional communication is reinforcing the bonds of community cooperation, mutual esteem and incorporation of all community members. At times, the elders and other community leaders may specifically want to reconcile people in conflict or mobilize the community for some kind of community enterprise. Traditional communication, with all of its symbolic connotation, is particularly active during rites of passage: the birth or naming of a child, the initiation of adolescents, the recognition of a son or daughter whose success brings credit to the community, marriages, and funerals. These are occasions for music, dancing, choral singing, colourful displays, and feasting. The symbolic instruments of communication such as drums will be brought out and their resonances will bring back nostalgic memories. Sons and daughters who live far away come back to the community and their presence is announced. Perhaps the good lives of the recently deceased will be recalled and the illness of some noted. Always there is recalling the memory of the ancestors in the past and calling of the people to work together for the future good of the community.

Life for most people in Africa is often lived close to the point of survival with continual misfortunes and unpredictable mishaps. The solidarity of the community is the only insurance that one has of getting somewhere in one's life. An education is achieved only with the support of those who are, for the moment, more fortunate. Community leaders know this and the people respond with enthusiasm to strengthen the commitment to community-everyone knowing that his or her hour of need may also come.
Research and Researchers in Traditional Communication

The following review tends to report with greater emphasis the published and widely available materials on traditional communication such as that of Ansu-Kyeremeh and research going on in West Africa, especially in Nigeria. This is due, in part, to the lack of information about this research circulating in Africa, and the fact that in Nigeria the universities commission has given official recognition to the area of traditional communication.

Kwasi Ansu-Kyeremeh - University of Ghana, Legon (Accra)

The research of Ansu-Kyeremeh on traditional communication (or 'indigenous communication' to use his own term) extends over nearly twenty years, from the late 1980s. His early research, published as Communication, Education and Development (1994, 1997) focused more on the use of traditional communication in rural education and in combination with mass media. His two volumes, Perspectives on Indigenous Communication in Africa, Vols I and II (1998) provide a wide-ranging collection of research from doctoral theses and other published sources. His more recent Indigenous Communication in Africa: Concept, Application and Prospects (2005) reprints some of the chapters from the 1998 book but includes some of his own more recent research. His bibliography on indigenous communication in the 2005 publication is one of the most comprehensive listings of publications on traditional communication in Africa.

The first volume is a nine-chapter book with contributions on various themes. Ansu-Kyeremeh's chapter on Indigenous Communication in Africa: A Conceptual Framework provides one of the best general theoretical frameworks for traditional communication that we have. In his definition of what he terms 'indigenous communication', Ansu-Kyeremeh stresses its imbeddedness in the local African cultures and in everyday life routines. He also notes its continuities with the pre-colonial socio-political, family and clan structure and the traditional socialization processes.

Ansu-Kyeremeh's theoretical framework explains many of the characteristics of traditional communication in terms of resistance to destructive, dehumanising Western influences and the protection of communities from the exploitative colonial and now post-colonial centralised state apparatus. He also points out its participatory, inclusive and relatively flexible, spontaneous nature in small communities. He argues that, unfortunately, the top-down development efforts of the state apparatus are ignoring traditional communication and are consequently largely ineffective. His own research and his publication of other research points out the significance of traditional communication in the current political scene in Africa and the efforts to get greater democratization and greater accountability of governance in Africa. The late Prof. Paul A. V. Ansah also contributed a more theoretical chapter entitled, In Search of a Role for the African Media in the Democratic Process. This chapter links traditional communication to the political process in Africa.

Joy Morrison's Communication and Social Change: A Case Study of Forum
Theatre in Burkina Faso, emphasizes the love of words in conversation and the centrality of performance in African everyday communication. She notes that one can often see clusters of people under a tree in villages or along the winding streets of vast urban settlements in seemingly endless discussion or 'palaver'. Here one finds the rhythm of poetic speech punctuated with rhetorical proverbs, argument and counter arguments, storytelling and jokes. Morrison affirms that all African adults become part of the community in song, dance, drama and highly rhetorical discussions. These public performative gatherings are the major form of teaching, social control, and defining values, but also ways of contesting tradition and insisting on personal respect and rights.

Louise Bourgault in her chapter, From Ritual to Theatre: Village-Based Drama for Development in Africa tells of the easy formation and spontaneity of village drama groups and the usefulness of this in teaching and development communication. Kees P. Epskamp's Theatre for Development and the Empowerment of Development Support Communication in Africa evaluates the use of drama for education in Botswana, Namibia, Nigeria, Malawi and Zimbabwe, but notes that these activities are often treated with suspicion by the political power structure. My own research, A Taxonomy of Traditional Media in Africa, is also published here in full.

A number of the studies reported in various chapters indicate that traditional communication is very much alive today and evolving in Ghana, Uganda, Burkina Faso and other various parts of Africa.

Desmond Wilson - University of Uyo, Nigeria

I take the liberty in this context to single out my own publication, A Taxonomy of Traditional Media in Africa (2005), reprinted from 1998 because it remains something of a model of the taxonomic description of traditional media and has been the template of other taxonomies of traditional communication in this area of research. Since my doctoral theses at the University of Ibadan on the contextual significance of traditional communication, my research has focused the functions of traditional communication in contemporary African life and the integration of traditional and modern communication, especially in relation to social development (1987; 2005).

In my edited collection, New Perspectives in Applied Communication (2005), I have included one chapter on Traditional Media and the Communication of Development Messages, again explaining how traditional communication can be of crucial importance in development communication. As Ansu-Kyeremeh and many others have pointed out, the development bureaucracies emanating out of the centralised state in African countries have failed in their development communication in large part because they tend to ignore and reject the networks of traditional communication that are the real mode of African communication at the grassroots level.

In another publication entitled Information Technology in a Traditional Society: In search of Relevance (Wilson, 2007), I argue for accommodation between
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traditional and modern communication systems. I observe that more recent debates have ‘revolved around the issue of relevance of African Traditional Communication Systems in an age . . . (of) ever-changing spectacle thrown up by modern information technology’. I also make the point that doubts have been expressed as to whether the new forms of communication would find fertile ground in a largely traditional society. I conclude that rather than expend our intellectual resources searching for differences and shortcomings, our attention should be directed at finding ways in which we can integrate the best resources of both systems into a dynamic cultural experience.

Kwasi Yankah - Dept of Linguistics, University of Ghana, Legon

Kwasi Yankah discusses Traditional lore in population communication: The case of the Akan in Ghana (1992). The article published in the Africa Media Review vol. 6 No. 1 argues for the use of African traditional collective knowledge and wisdom in the dissemination of government policy especially in family planning issues.

Dede E.J. Konkwo - Dept of Mass Communication, Imo State University, Owerri Nigeria

With his book Perspectives in African Traditional Communication Systems (1997) Dede E. J. Konkwo, responds to the need for a textbook to accompany the Nigerian National Universities Commission's course, African Communication System. The publication discusses the structure, form and content of traditional communication, the social environment of communication in traditional African society as well as oral communication in traditional African society. The text also takes up the role of song, proverbs, riddles, narratives, myths, folktales, as well as the limitations of oral tradition.

Ini Uko - Dept of English, University of Uyo, Uyo Nigeria

Ini Uko's article, Traditional Communication in Anaangland: Issues, problems and prospects (2000) discusses various forms of traditional communication verbal and nonverbal, found in Anaangland (Akwa Ibom, South-South Nigeria). The research she reports explores the issues, problems and prospects of the traditional communication system in the area as they are affected by the new technologies.

Eno Akpabio - University of Botswana

Akpabio has also published a textbook entitled African Communication System: An Introduction (2003) in which he has borrowed largely from the publications of Ansu-Kyeremeh and others in the area of classification, identification and designation of functions.
Akpanabo also included in his edited textbook on *Communication and Social Action* (1997) three chapters contributed by myself on Traditional communication: Oramedia and Human Communication, The Role of Market Women's Association in Development Communication and Traditional Media for Promotion. The first discusses the relationship between oramedia and human communication while the other two discuss functions of market women's association in development communication and promotional activities using traditional media.

**O.S. Enemaku - formerly University of Lagos, now with UNICEF**

In a 2003 article in the *Journal of Media and Aesthetics*, vol. 1 No. 3, published here at the at University of Uyo, O. S. Enemaku discusses Aesthetics of Igala Traditional Communication System and the Challenge of Modernity. Enemaku analyses the aesthetics of Igala communication systems and suggests how the forms, aesthetics and contents of this unique system can be made relevant to the social needs of the people in the age of globalisation. The Igala are in the Middle Belt Region (North central Nigeria).

**I.E. Nwosu - Dept of Marketing, University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus and Ifeyinwa Nsude - Dept of Mass Communication, Ebonyi State University, Abakalik, Nigeria**

In a text edited by I.E. Nwosu, J.E. Aliede, and I. Nsude (2005), Chinenye Nwabueze discusses Career opportunities in traditional communication. This is the first contribution in this sub-discipline which sees traditional communication as potentially an area similar to public relations, advertising, and journalism in which a communication graduate can make a career. She argues correctly that if people do not see the possibility of a career in the field, the urge to become trained in it will not be there. She lists possible areas for the achievement of career opportunities such as traditional media consultancy, traditional media research, traditional media management, message content, meaning and application, campaign planning, execution and evaluation. Perhaps one could add, traditional media practice and trado-modern communication.

It must be added, however, that there is need to develop a body of systematic, research-based knowledge about traditional communication to sustain professionalism in this area before beginning efforts to develop career prospects in the field. Rather than see the above as areas within the sub-discipline where one can establish professionalism it may be better to see them as areas of course offerings, including internships, which could form the core area of practice for those who have decided to make a career in it.

Nwosu and Nsude have also brought out a more recent book, *Trado-Modern Communication System: Interface and Dimensions* (2007), dealing with traditional communication. This is a comprehensive text, which discusses not only traditional communication issues but also some modern media issues. Some of the key chapters in this book include, Chinenye Nwabueze's Synergizing the Traditional and Modern
mass media for Sustainable development communication in Africa, Jeno Enighe's Proverbs as the language of social communication in traditional African society, Christiana Chukwu's The interface of traditional African communication and the modern mass media, Chris Ngwu's The traditional media: Forms, contents and roles, Dele Odunlanri's An examination of the application and relevance of Des Wilson's taxonomy of traditional media systems in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart, and Des Wilson and Mfon Itek's 'Traditional communication: The encoding and decoding processes, among others.

Ben Nwanne - Dept of Mass Communication, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

Ben Nwanne's article in the Journal of Media and Aesthetics, Speech, proverb and folklore aesthetics in traditional African communication (2006), reports research among the East Deltans (Delta State, South-South Nigeria). Nwanne makes a strong case for the use of a local language as a linguistic system committed to ensuring its translation of the vision of their dreams and aspirations into reality.

There are other ongoing studies dealing with traditional communication among scholars of private and public universities in Nigeria and in other parts of Africa especially at the undergraduate level. But given the fact that the sub-discipline of traditional communication has not been developed to a level of it being considered an area of choice by graduate students, very little of serious research with some academic value is going on. Moreover, research in this area does not appear to confer on students a sense of high status as is the case with research on broadcasting, public relations and advertising. There is also a growing fear that some day the ever-increasing forms of new information and communication technologies may drive the field of traditional communication underground. This fear is based on an unfounded supposition that new technologies can replace old ones.

Yet the failure of modern technology in many critical areas of our lives has reinforced the belief of most researchers in this area that rather than be forced underground, new communication media and technologies cohabit with traditional communication technology and practices. Even those who are not experts in communication know and have averred to the fact that regardless of whatever the channel that is used 'communication calms hearts that have been wounded by war and famine, and softens spirits'. And that through communication, 'we are able to create an atmosphere of love, peace and understanding' (Ester, A., Jeunesse Epanouie, Togo Dec. 2007). It is also in the realization of the importance of communication in war or disaster situations that the director of the World Food Programme had to call for special training in forms of communication closer to everyday life for all participants in crisis situations like the 911 traumatic experience of Americans in 2001.

Conclusion

As we have already observed there is now enough published and unpublished research materials to design a training manual and guidelines for future
practitioners of traditional communication in Africa. Africa can then serve as a centre for disseminating knowledge in this area to the rest of the world.

This can go on side by side with the training of mass media workers and modern mass media practitioners. The increasing interest in traditional communication in Africa is a clearly defined, documented, and well designed interface structure for a trado-modern communication practice. All the research evidence shows that traditional communication remains the most important communication structure for Africans and that the traditional and the modern are interacting in the lives of most. Many who may have seen its importance have abandoned the responsibility and desire to argue their case. This has to change if we are to derive optimum benefit from our communication efforts in Africa. All the media and interpersonal channels, which have constituted a dynamic force for meaning exchange and sharing, must be properly harnessed to bring about success in our communication efforts.

There is really nothing to be ashamed of if one has been trained under modern media conditions. To seek a multi-media model of communication is not a retrogression. Modern medical practitioners are now canvassers for our traditional healing ways. However, more and better-focused research studies have to be carried out to address the difficulties that are inherent in the traditional communication system. This is the road we must take in the years ahead.

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Research on traditional communication in Africa


Blending new technology with local indigenous cultures: A new approach to communication for rural development

Festus A. Tarawalie*

Abstract

The present article reports the evaluation of the factors which contributed to the success or failure of the FAO's People's Participation Programme in setting up sustainable networks of people-controlled rural organisations in seven African countries. In countries such as Zambia where the programme evolved into a people's NGO that continued after the programme, the key factor was allowing the people the freedom to build on their local knowledge, traditional cooperative organisations in villages and traditional communication. A 'conversation' between local groups and technical assistants allowed local groups to 'blend' new forms of organisation such as formalised byelaws and federation into the traditional forms of communicative relations to make these more effective in a globalising culture. Where blending was operative, there were more rapid increases in productivity, capitalisation and sustainability. This article analyses the programme conditions which facilitated a process of blending and the role of African 'communalistic root paradigms' in cultural blending.

It is widely recognized that Africa is increasingly unable to supply its own food needs. The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has estimated that almost 200 million Africans were undernourished in the year 2000, compared with 133 million 20 years earlier (InterAcademy Council, 2003:1) About 33 percent of the people of Sub-Saharan Africa are undernourished compared to 15 per cent in Asia. In the countries of East Africa, especially Tanzania, between 40 and 50 per cent of the population is undernourished. Over the last 20 years, per capita crop and livestock production declined by about 0.2 percent per year(InterAcademy Council, 2003:1) The projected aggregate demand for food over the next 15 years will be growing at the rate of 2.8 percent per year, but production growth will be only 2.6 percent per year.

The agricultural sector in Africa not only is not generating the resources for a transition to industrialisation, but increasing food imports are using up the meagre foreign exchange resources needed for improved education and communication. Ironically, most of the malnourished in Africa are found in the rural, food-producing areas. The further irony is that the relatively large outlay of resources (though certainly not enough) for agricultural research, agricultural universities to train professionals in agricultural sciences and to support rural extension and education systems is not

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solving the problem of agricultural production. Increases in food production are coming largely from incorporation of forests and grazing land, not from the increased productivity of agriculture itself. African countries do have the technology, the capital resources and the rural extension systems for increasing agricultural productivity and rural welfare, but somehow this is not getting into the hands of rural people.

There are many causes of this problem, but there is increasingly wide consensus that lack of communication has been one of the central problems: lack of communication among rural people, lack of communication with technical support agents, lack of communication of rural people with policy makers, lack of communication among the hundreds of NGOs that work in rural areas. We now understand more clearly that agricultural producers themselves have the most important knowledge about their practices (Scoones and Thompson, 1994). The rural people are the main agents of experimentation on their own plots of land, the seekers of new information, the decision makers on the best way to introduce new farming practices and the judges of when to use borrowed credit for improving production. Improving agricultural productivity is a process of search and exchange among many actors: rural people themselves, leaders in rural communities, extensionists and the researchers in agricultural universities. The question is: how do we introduce in practical terms this dialogue building on agriculturalists' own indigenous knowledge and organisation?

This article presents a summary analysis of the evaluation data of a major project of the FAO in seven African countries which was designed to understand how ministries of agricultural could cooperate with the initiatives of rural communities to increase productivity and incomes. The People's Participation Programme (PPP) was an international project designed in the early 1980s following the 1979 World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development and promoted in Asia and Africa (McKone, 1990). In Africa the PPP was based on a contract agreement between donor countries and African governments (concretely, Ministries of Agriculture) through the agency of the FAO office in Rome. Between 1982 and 1984 the cooperative projects were begun in Sierra Leone, Ghana, Zambia, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Swaziland. In 1987 it was extended to Tanzania and Lesotho. The relations with donor agencies were terminated gradually in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but the evaluation data continued to come into the Rome FAO offices until after 2000.

The PPP programmes were designed to incorporate nearly all of the recommended ways generated by research in the 1970s and early 1980s for improving cooperative communication in rural communities and with the many other actors providing assistance (McKone, 1990: 9-10).

1. A focus on the rural poor as the principal beneficiaries.
2. Helping the poor to form small homogeneous self-help groups (8 to 15 persons) using participatory consciousness-raising and decision making methods as a basis of forming organizations for action.
3. Action research involving the people themselves with the objective of assessing the socio-economic conditions and influences, defining the
problems to act on, determining the course of action, organizing the groups
to carry out actions, and continual evaluation of performance.
4. The participatory training of Group Promoters (paraprofessionals) through
continuous field workshops oriented toward problem-solving and the
sensitising of local officials and leaders as to the objectives of the PPP.
5. The establishment of Income-Generating Activities (IGAs) as a tangible
form of participation with opportunities for economic benefits as a means to
achieving greater social and political participation in national development
programmes.
6. The introduction of savings and credit schemes.
7. The organisation of inter-group associations to provide services and support
to groups.
8. The establishment of local coordinating committees bringing together
representatives of groups, government officials and local leaders.
9. The implementation of continuous participatory monitoring and evaluation
processes at all stages and levels of the project and with the full participation
of group members.

In short, the PPP was based on the premise that the people of Africa are
motivated to improve their life conditions and will take initiatives to do so if there
are opportunities. The participatory dimension was designed to encourage to the
maximum the communication among the people to take collaborative initiatives and
to establish communication linkages with sources of information and resources that
would respond to the initiatives.

The most salient aspects of the design were, firstly, encouraging the already
existing local groups (often of women) rather than introducing new organisations
such as formal cooperatives. This meant that the groups were rooted in the
traditional patterns of communication and cooperation and means of insuring that all
members would be trustworthy and responsible. It also meant that groups would
bring with them traditional knowledge of how to set up productive activities,
marketing, saving and getting resources. The programme did not avoid formal
cooperatives as such because many of the PPP groups formed cooperatives, but,
because these have tended, in Africa, to be instruments for imposing central planning
goals by the bureaucratic elites rather than responding to initiatives, the people were
given the freedom to choose their own forms of cooperative organisation.

Secondly, local leaders who had a good deal of voluntary commitment to the
community and were respected by the community were made paraprofessional group
promoters. The group promoter lived in the village and was part of the village
communication system, not an outsider. Group promoters were responsible for a
great deal of informal training of the people of the village and helping the groups
through processes of analysis of problems and improving their organisation. These
group promoters were given training in the objectives of the program and how to
serve as communication linkages. The group promoter was a communication link
between groups in surrounding villages, with government extension agents and
NGOs and other development agencies such as banks, the extension service, sources
of supplies such as seeds, and marketing possibilities.

A third important communication element was the linking of local community groups into associations at a district level and at a regional level. These associations had elected representatives who were expected to be accountable to the members of the local groups. These associations were encouraged to eventually form an NGO which would be responsive to the members but would be able to negotiate services and resources with, for example, the agricultural extension system of the government.

A fourth important emphasis was sustainability, that is, the continuation of the structures of participatory communication after the withdrawal of the support of the donor agencies and also the more intensive support of the extension system or other agencies of the host government. This would mean that the participatory communication patterns would be so deeply institutionalised that they would become an integral part of the indigenous culture or organisation for production and general problem solving. The ideal solution would be an autonomous organisation at the local, regional and national level which could negotiate and administer its own technical assistance, credit needs and marketing.

The methodology of analysis

The fact that the PPP had a relatively similar approach in the seven countries of Africa provided an ideal experiment-like study of how the different socio-political systems deal with a participatory, people-initiated plan of action. The voluminous reports and evaluations varied somewhat in their style and depth, but on the whole they revealed that different socio-political systems and different socio-cultural contexts resisted or supported a participatory approach in very different ways. The reports and evaluations tended to follow a stage-by-stage historical narrative of the process so that it could be seen what were the factors that favoured or hindered the final goal: much improved productivity and improved quality of life based on the relatively autonomous local, district and regional initiatives of the people.

The central question in the evaluations of the PPP programme in the various countries was whether the participatory elements of the PPP did in fact bring about stronger group formation, more successful activity in the groups, greater productivity in terms of poverty reduction and capital formation and, above all, sustainability of groups and their district and regional organisation after the donor agency ceased its support. This study, using the reports and evaluations as a base, was interested in the effectiveness of the participatory elements, but, more specifically, how effective this strategy was in bridging the communication gap, and if the gap was bridged how effective was the improved communication in terms of the indicators mentioned above.

Most especially, this study was interested in understanding what aspects of the improved communication seemed to be especially related to the indicators of sustainable improvement of the situation of the rural poor and why these factors were important.

It was evident, from the first analysis of the data, that some of the country
projects were much more effective in implementing the strategy of the PPA than others. Thus, the question of the study was whether the countries that were able to implement the PPP in all aspects in fact, have better results and why. For example, the initial perusal of the evaluation reports showed that in Zambia and, to some extent, in Ghana, the PPP had the best results in that, at the end of the project, the groups formed an NGO and were continuing on with greater capitalisation and increased productivity without too much support from either the donor agencies or the government. Tanzania, on the other hand, had the worst results in that almost all the groups simply disappeared after the donor agency left.

To get a more rigorous and objective comparison of the country projects in terms of the communication elements, the steps toward sustainable group development were defined in terms of six stages of the evolution of communication capacity:

1. The extension system as a participatory catalyst stimulating groups to define their problems and initiate organised action of their own choosing plus training in participatory communication where it was necessary.
2. As a result of the initial catalyst, the groups developed the capacity to form a participatory action organisation with strong solidarity, mutual trust, to carry out decisions with accountability to members.
3. Given the organisational capacity of local action groups did the groups mobilise for initiating and sustaining project activity.
4. Along with project activity, the ability to form sustained communication linkages with other groups and with resource agencies to begin a long-term, ongoing process of local improvements.
5. As the groups formed linkages, did they also develop communication self-reliance, usually an NGO type of organisation that could negotiate continually stronger linkages for technical assistance, training, capital resources, and marketing.
6. And, finally, cost-effectiveness in terms of the amount of project resources needed to bring a given level of increase of income and capitalisation of the groups.

Setting up a methodology of analysis

To introduce some degree of objectivity in the comparison of the application of the programme in different countries, a detailed set of coding indicators were applied to give each country PPP project a score on each of the six dimensions mentioned above. For each of the six dimensions concrete indicators were devised based on the PPP strategy and other models of participatory rural development. For example, the Zambia PPP project scored the highest on virtually all six of the communication capacity dimensions while the projects in Kenya and Zimbabwe were consistently among the lowest in participatory communication capacity.

The purpose, however, was not primarily a quantified judgement of the degree of application of the indicators of participatory communication but rather to focus
the analysis on specific aspects of the strengthening of participatory capacity. It was then possible to examine in much more ethnographic detail the values, practices, use of local knowledge and local culture pointed to by each of the indicators of the six dimensions. The approach can best be described as ‘grounded research’. The PPP programme intended that each of the country projects be an experimental, learning process. Virtually all of the agents involved in the projects - the agricultural extension systems, the leaders in the communities and districts and the donor agencies - were all gaining a new understanding of the process. By looking closely at the history of each project and the changing perceptions of what to do, much was gradually learned. Also important in this study is the analysis of the relationship between particular values and actions that emerged in the project and the practices at the grassroots level. As new intuitions emerged regarding what seem to cause the success of certain country projects, it was possible to go back to the data and examine that relationship in greater detail.

For example, in the case of the Zambian project, the decision was made to base the local organisations on traditional cooperative groups that already existed, especially traditional groups among women. The analysis revealed that the strong development of the community projects in Zambia was due, in no small part, to the fact that the groups were based on traditional forms of cooperation. It was then possible to examine much more in detail the interaction between the traditional practices and new ideas coming from training courses. Out of this came the concept of the ‘blending’ of the traditional and the new that forms the central point of analysis of this article.

The country projects which developed enduring participatory communication

The country project which had developed the greatest sustainability was that of Western Zambia. More than 80 per cent of the groups that were present at the high point were still functioning well when the last data was gathered in 1998 some six or more years after the donor agency ceased its support and after the government's agricultural extension agency ceased its catalyst promotion of groups (Khanda, 1998, see PPS: Three-Year Business Plan 1999-2001). Most of the groups had been absorbed into an autonomous NGO, People’s Participation Service (PPS), under officers elected by the grassroots groups. The PPS continued to negotiate agreements of service with the extension service and other support agencies. In Sierra Leone, another very successful case, a similar sort of NGO was organised.

The groups in Zambia registered a steady growth in savings, far outstripping even the most optimistic expectations, and, at end of the evaluation, the great majority of the groups were actively involved in group saving activities and building up the capital base of the groups. The groups had ceased to depend on any loans from the government. The groups continued to meet regularly and moved from the original small projects to other community improvements such as bridges, schools, meeting centres and storage facilities.
The PPS in Western Zambia continued to develop the two-tier grouping of local organisations in Area Advisory Committees (AAC) to negotiate with various agencies to continue a sustainable support delivery system. The AACs were self-financing, and, because of the initial and continued training of the officers and elected leadership, the AACs continued to have an experienced, well-trained and highly motivated staff at headquarters, district and Action Area levels. Likewise, in the Sierra Leone case, there was a continued growth in the number of groups in the post-project period and the PPP methodology was expanding in other regions.

In terms of cost-effectiveness, the projects in Zambia, Sierra Leone and Ghana which placed emphasis on local paraprofessional promoters and developing a large number of groups, cost relatively little per participant, but had the greatest gains in terms of increased income, savings and sustainability (Geran, 1996). The Ghana project was cost-efficient because it used an existing grassroots promotional agency of the churches.

Country projects which failed to develop participatory communication structures

In Tanzania, in contrast to projects such as that in Zambia which focused investment in working with local groups and local promoters, the investment was focused on a curriculum development in a cooperative training college. Although the Tanzania project cost more, the money tended to be channelled into the salaries of the government bureaucracies. Instead of working with grassroots groups supporting income-generating and savings activities, resources were directed toward discussions in government bureaucracies, training of government personnel and NGOs.

The project emphasised conventional classroom training in the agricultural college rather than training of members and leaders in the villages. The project insisted on using print materials which proved useless for largely illiterate farmers, rather than focusing training on the experimental projects in the villages. The training was quite formal, rather Western-influenced and paid little attention to the local knowledge of the people. The savings scheme in the project failed not so much because of a lack of group interest to save, but because the official banking institutions were preferred over the traditional saving methods in villages. Peasant farmers were involved in the use of banks when unofficial inflation was around 80 per cent and interest rates on bank accounts stood at 19 per cent. The participants opened an account as required by paying Tsh 250 and simply left it there (Koppers, 1994).

The groups in Tanzania were neither voluntary nor autonomous and democratic, but largely controlled by the local political structure. There was almost total default in loan repayment, in part because of the dependency attitude government had instilled in groups-groups perceived the loans as 'grant in aid' (Koppers, 1994. The program did not encourage groups to freely choose income-generating activities or savings toward building up capital in the groups. The project was used by bureaucratic and political actors to achieve quick, visible, quantified short-term
results, and left little room for the long-term underlying process of genuine organisational learning and capacity building.

Given the fact that the groups were treated as a kind of 'pilot project', dependent directly on the college, there was no attempt to develop a district or regional organisation of groups with linkages among group. The groups and project died as soon the donor money was finished (Koppers, 1994: 24-26). The project in Tanzania cost a great deal with little results, but the cost per farmer beneficiary was the highest of all the projects, nearly $1,229 per beneficiary.

It is important to recall that the PPP chose to work with the sectors of the population in Africa that are considered to be almost impossible to bring into the development process: rural and cut off from communication, largely illiterate, with seemingly low motivation and coping abilities, with very little land, often undernourished, the most vulnerable to debilitating disease such as malaria, with almost no margin of resources to face risks. Yet these groups responded with remarkable success in completing productive projects, high rates of payment of loans, a capitalisation process that was often beyond expectations, a level of organisation and self-help that was enduring and the ability to form a regional management NGO that could provide services far better than the agricultural extension agencies or other urban-technical sectors.

Discovering the process of 'blending' new technology with indigenous culture

Once the step by step history of the PPP programme in different countries was set out clearly and the outcomes of sustainability were clear, the analysis began to ask why the PPP was so significantly more successful in some projects than in others. It became clear that a key factor in the countries of greater 'success' was that the PPP connected with long-standing indigenous organisations and indigenous approaches to income-generating activities. In fact, a number of the evaluations explicitly pointed this out. It was evident that the PPP did not simply let the groups continue with their traditional approaches, but knew how to engage the people to rethink their existing forms of organisation and production and to see the weak points in this. The PPP did not necessarily come up with the pre-established 'right recipes' for solving problems but explored with the people possible alternatives. I was quite familiar with this kind of process in my own native Sierra Leone, and the image of 'mixture' or 'blending' came to mind. It would be difficult to say that the discovery of innovative solutions came from the people or from the advisors. In the end, the blending in of new ideas was almost unnoticeable. With this hypothesis, I went back to the data to examine more closely what a blending process might mean.

Allowing the people to take the initiative

Perhaps the most important factor was that the government and other agencies provided a structure of freedom in which the people were encouraged to deliberate together to define their priority problems, decide what projects they wanted to
embark on, choose leaders they trusted, take the initiatives in setting up some kind of organization and search for resources with the promise that the guidance and resources would be forthcoming. The people were free to work within their range of knowledge and experience-whatever that might be-and the urban-technical sector firmly responded to the initiatives of the people.

This was not the classical modernisation model of development in which the decisions are made by central planning bureaus and imposed on an often bewildered rural population, and with goals of production and management that are completely beyond the capacity of ministries to support and respond to. In the central planning, extension model inevitably the few professional extension agents do not have the transport and communication system to be in contact people's problems and questions, no one is trained to use media effectively to communicate, there is not the capacity to process millions of small loans or the transport to provide marketing. The planners in a distant national capital, responding to international Breton Woods institutions, set the impossible goals and the people suffer the consequences of repeated failure.

The model of response to people's initiatives in this case meant that the people could select the kind of projects that were within their range of experience and that they knew how to manage. The priorities were the people's own perceived needs and projects that were relatively low risk. The people could choose their own mode of organisation which, as we will see, was based on traditional forms of cooperation among people with their own form of choosing leadership. The great majority avoided the formal sector of finance and preferred their own forms of traditional capitalisation.

The other side of the success was a structure of technical guidance which responded to the questions and needs of the people when the questions came up and in the way the people could understand and apply what was suggested. In fact, the technical guidance and education was simply part of a discussion process in the action groups that incorporated all in a circle of dialogue: members of the groups, leaders of the groups, paraprofessional group promoters and to some extent professional extensionists and representatives of NGOs. The groups defined the level of discussion, the topic and questions, the language of the discussion, the rhythm of discussion and those with more technical training joined this.

The PPP did not introduce a new form of organisation but worked with the cooperative activities that are typical of so many rural communities throughout Africa. What the PPP brought was a more systematic process of group action governed by byelaws drawn up by members themselves. This varied considerably from country to country, but in Sierra Leone, for example, the byelaws set out group structure and division of responsibility, laws governing membership, meeting schedules, division of benefits/profits, use of funds and sanctions against uncooperative members (FAO/Thomas, 1994: 6). The better off members of the community, the local elite, could join the groups as ordinary members although they often served as advisers and rarely held the position of group leader.

As we shall note more in detail below, rather informal cooperative action is traditional in Africa, but with the PPP these groups were also the place were the flow
of new ideas of trained paraprofessional promoters, extension representatives and
many other representatives entered into the discussion. What is important in this
process is that the local people are always in control of the process and always feel
fully responsible for the outcomes of decision. Particularly important in the process
of blending are the group promoters, people who live in the communities and are part
of the traditions of the community but have more contact and training coming from
the urban-technical sector. These paraprofessionals acted as bridges and interpreters
whenever some idea was not 'blending' as smoothly as the people would like.

When the local people felt the need for a fairly thorough and systematic
introduction to new procedures, they would voice the need of a training course and
the PPP would respond with a training course in the local communities, with the
introduction of an experimental plot or demonstration in the communities or talks by
visiting experts. Training, introduction of new seed varieties or new animal breeds
or whatever else was introduced always came in response to a question or request
from the people themselves. Usually, such an introduction was prefaced with some
explanation of the costs involved, the conditions that had to be met, etc. so that the
people were ready to assume the change in their life routines, the costs and the risks
that might be involved.

As the description of the process as blending became clearer to me, I went back
to more official and formal definitions of blending to get further insights. To 'blend'
according to the Oxford dictionary is to 'mix different types of something in order to
produce the quality required'. To blend in' has many connotations: to combine well
with something so that the distinction of elements is no longer noticed; in the case of
colours and shapes, to look good together; in the case of music, to mix in harmony;
in the case of persons, a newcomer becoming fully a part of the group. In the case
of rural development, blending means introducing new solutions to problems so that
these become almost unnoticeably a part of the ongoing culture of solutions in the
community. The distinction of traditional and modern disappear. What comes to the
forefront is simply the accepted local culture, 'that complex whole which includes
knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and many other capabilities and habits
acquired by man as a member of society' (Tylor, 1958). The process which
programmes such as the PPP set in motion is not a conscious effort of 'modernising
backward people', but rather simply living the culture of a community with its
values, world view and constantly changing repertoire of strategies for a better life.

Blending presupposes a process of constant cultural change. The theory of
pragmatics which explains how we bridge the gap between the sentence of a speaker
and the understanding of the listener by creating a third commonly understood term
(Coulson, 2001) also provides an insight into the meaning of blending. The creation
of meaning in the blending process is expected to create a new cultural space - a
culture of common understanding between the modernising, globalising culture in
which the development initiative is coded and the culture of the primary stake
holders, the local communities, in which it is decoded and transformed into the signs
and symbols that are present in the local milieu. The resulting alternative
space/culture is what we refer to here as an 'alternative culture for development'.
An alternative culture for development is a culture created in the process of blending.
It is evident from the PPP reports that traditional cooperative group practices were being used in many of the PPP groups. It would be wrong, however, to imagine that a given PPP group was employing exactly the formula described in some ethnographic report of the region. The cooperative group practices in the PPP were usually quite pragmatic and used a mixture or blending of whatever would work in the given situation. Cooperative group action and savings seem to be at their best when these are rooted in motivations and traditions that are part of local knowledge, but the training and exchange with extension systems were bringing about a rapid evolution of these practices.

Once the concept of blending became somewhat more clear, I went back to the experiences of the groups in the PPP programme to explore this further.

**Cooperative group action as a form of blending**

**Zambia**

As was noted above, the PPP project in Western Zambia generated a quite cohesive, enduring group formation which was the basis for a regional NGO. The relative success of the PPP in Western Zambia, according to the evaluation of Huizer (1997), an experienced social scientist, is related to the prevailing Lozi (Barotze) culture in that area where traditions of organised action are particularly strong. Huizer carried out various evaluations of the PPP where the government of the Netherlands was involved, and he concludes that success of introducing cooperative group action may depend on how well this builds upon the traditions of cooperative activities in the local communities.

**Sierra Leone**

A second PPP project that rated high in group solidarity and which continued to expand with new groups after the formal project finished is that in Sierra Leone. Although the PPP evaluation reports for Sierra Leone did not stress the building of groups on the traditional forms of cooperative action, the importance in Sierra Leone of cooperative work groups, called farming *compins*, has been widely noted. These groups tend to involve primarily male members of a particular village or group of villages in a locality. As in other parts of West Africa, the young men often form age groups and are expected to be available to work as groups for community improvement or in mutual help for each other. Throughout the season, the young men rotate work together on the farm of each one.

Donald described the *yalunka* cooperative work groups in northern Sierra Leone as groups formed by young men who join together during the planting season to help each other in the rice planting (Cited in Magbaily-Fyle: 1970). The groups usually include all of a particular age group in a village or group of villages, especially where there is not enough working hands. These groups usually made up of five or ten men and they move around to the fields of each until the planting is done. In some clans or villages the women may also join them.
The compins in Sierra Leone were especially popular among the Temne ethnic group. This reflects the greater devolution of power which encourages the formation of socially and sometimes economically autonomous subgroups. The kabothor groups among the Temne and Kune people and the maworis groups among the Limba people in Sierra Leone have had a much more open membership structure. The groups are believed to foster friendship and social relations and to uphold the sense of belonging to the group and to the community at large (Banton, 1956; Dorjahn, 1960). Although the compins are becoming less important with the introduction of semi-mechanised agriculture (Magbaily-Fyle, 1988), they continue to be important among the poorer people that the PPP was working with.

Ghana

In Ghana, where the PPP groups were rated high in solidarity and organizational capacity, there are also traditions of cooperative labour in villages. The nnoboa groups in Ghana operate purely as ad hoc labour pools among close neighbours or friends for purposes of land cleaning or weeding, especially when there is a farm labour scarcity. The nnoboa rotational mutual assistance groups have been in existence for generations and have been a mainstay in the resource-poor farmers (Eponou, 1996). They are informal, occasional, casual and rather weakly defined groups of neighbouring farmers who come together to perform occasional group activities during the farming season. The nnoboa groups have no regular constitutions or by-laws. They operate on the basis of a 'gentleman's agreement'. The members, beyond fulfilling the mutual obligation of reciprocity, see no need to organise group mediation for acquisition of needed farm inputs and services (Nani-Nutakor, 1987: 69).

Lesotho

The setokofele in Lesotho are traditional mutual assistance groups, such as funeral societies, in which money is raised and a feast is often held. Food is prepared, beer brewed and there is often musical entertainment. Friends and relatives attend and purchase the food and drinks (McMurchy, 1990). Moreover, there is an implicit agreement that the host will attend a setokefele organised by any of his or her guests in a kind of give and take mutual understanding. In other words, do not host a setokofele if you do not intend to attend other setokofeles.

The setokofele mutual assistance groups were widely used in the PPP project in Lesotho. The pitso method, a village-wide meeting which provides a forum for discussion of community affairs, was also influential in the PPP groups in Lesotho. This was done with the aim of helping prospective beneficiaries know the workings of the project and to encourage them to identify income-generating activities based on their needs.
In the lilima cooperative agricultural groups in Swaziland, the members of a given locality form work parties which go from homestead to homestead for weeding or harvesting on a rotational basis. The *lilima* is especially useful for members who may face labour problems at peak work times. In this practice, traditional beer is provided and the activities have social as well as pragmatic benefits. Some of the PPP reports from Swaziland report that "They made *lilima* together" (Neese, 1987: 121).

**Traditional cooperative work groups in other parts of Africa**

The present study has tended to focus on countries where the PPP was operating, but in virtually every country of sub-Sahara Africa one can find examples of the development of significant rural organisation on the foundations of traditional cooperative groups in rural communities.

The Naam Federation in Burkina Faso, for example, is considered to be the largest farmers' organisation in that country and one of the largest if not the largest in French-speaking Africa. The Naam Federation grew from a network of traditional farmers' group in the Yatenga Region and quickly spread to other regions. The Federation's ideals are built on similar existing local and traditional groups in Burkina Faso. In 1996 the Naam organisations had more than 300,000 farmers in 4,563 groups and 63 unions from 1,200 villages and 18 out of the 30 provinces in the country (Eponou, 1996).

In all the countries described above, there is evidence of the blending process in the PPP or other projects. A condition for becoming part of the PPP programme was to work as groups. Most of the groups tended to select as their projects the kind of agricultural or craft activities that they had been accustomed to in their traditional groupings. This was especially true in the groups of women since women in Africa tend to work together in gardening projects, brewing beer or in traditional crafts. Other evidence of the influence of traditional cooperative activities was the tendency to select leaders not on a rotational basis as is the Western democratic tradition but on the basis of character, respect, and ability to deal with others. Although groups were trained in the formal non-directive leadership of democracy, there was much evidence of the traditional forms of discussion in which a person of respect guided discussions.

**The role of traditional savings schemes in the PPP programme**

In most of the PPP projects where savings and capitalisation continued on after the direct support of the donor agency and the agricultural extension agency was discontinued, there had already existed a traditional system of creating a fund for loans. One of the reasons for the surprising growth in capitalisation of the groups is that was already rooted in the local culture.
Zambia

The PPP in Zambia promoted the use of the traditional savings schemes, and in 1993 some 97 of the groups promoting savings with a traditional institution.

Sierra Leone and Ghana

A form of savings and mutual assistance widely practiced in West Africa and in the areas where the PPP is operating is known as osusu or susu. Like the work groups or compins, osusu schemes bring people, usually women, in a given locality together for cooperative action. The members designate a certain amount of money that each must contribute to a common fund in an agreed time frame (weekly, monthly, etc.). The small weekly or monthly payments can be sustained with meager incomes. The amount of money collected is given, in a rotational way, to one member at a time when that person has need of it, for example, for buying seeds for planting. When all have received their grant, a new process of rotation is begun. This institution enables members to get a loan with little or no interest when they need it—one of the reasons the members prefer this to official government loans. The commitment is maintained by informal social controls, but defaulters may be liable to sanctions in the local courts or by confiscation of property. To reduce the incidence of default, a trusted person within the group or in the community is charged with the responsibility of collecting payments and paying out to members.

Although the PPP reports do not explicitly mention the osusu traditions, it is evident from the PPP reports that the osusu traditions in Sierra Leone and Ghana were a significant factor in increasing the savings capacities of the PPP groups. The increase was influential both in terms of the number of people saving at a particular moment and in the amount being saved. The comparison of the September 1985 and February 1986 Statistical Reports of the PPP in Sierra Leone indicates a rapid increase in groups which were saving, from 24 to 50 groups. But when one examines the form of saving, it is clear that the traditional practices were the most influential. Those saving with traditional institutions increased from 21 in 1985 to 44 groups in 1986, while those saving with the banking institution increased from only 3 in 1985 to 6 groups in 1986.

Kenya

The Jehudi Kibera/Group lending scheme in Kenya is another example of traditional credit schemes. It is based on the methodology of the Grameen Bank founded by Muhammad Yunus in Bangladesh. It is run by the Kenyan Rural Enterprise Programme, a donor-funded NGO. Each borrowing group is known as a watano. As in the case of the Grameen Bank, several watano groups form a larger association called kiwa (kikundi cha wanabishara) or literally translated, 'group of entrepreneurs'. Unlike the Grameen Bank, however, in Kenya all members of the kiwa are liable for all loans to everyone in the kiwa, even people associated with a different watano (Ghatak and Guinnane, 1999: 195-228; Mutua, 1994: 275).

In the Kenyan PPP project the use of existing traditional savings schemes have
also been very popular, although the formal banking institutions also occupied an integral part of the savings component. In the March-September Statistical Report of the PPP project in Kenya, the estimated value of savings in traditional group schemes was Ksh 119,830 while the individual savings balance in banking institutions was Ks 104,000.

The term *chikande* or *chiraundi* refers to ad hoc, rotational savings practices in Zimbabwe, and there is some evidence that these traditions such as these were used in some of the PPP groups. According to Dzingirai (2000: 37), the present-day schemes in some regions of Zimbabwe are derived from an ancient practice in which members ‘pass around’ or ‘drop’ gifts (*kandira*) in the plate of a new and unexpected ‘celebrity’. In the rural Chivi District of Zimbabwe, the activity refers to an old practice where villagers exchange gifts or valuables (*kandirana*). Members in the savings groups in this part of Zimbabwe may agree to give each other goods or cash or both goods and cash. Membership is usually between 5 and 15 persons drawn from the same neighbourhood, the same kingship or sometimes from the same religious group. The groups today often have a more formal leadership structure of chairman (*sachidaro* or *mukuru*), a treasurer (*mubati wehomwe*), a secretary (*munyori*), and committee members or helpers (*vabetsere*) (Dzingirai, 2000).

In the Zimbabwe PPP project, as of 23 August 1989, 8 groups held savings traditional saving institutions and 34 groups preferred to put the savings in a banking institution (Jassat et al, 1983: 37-38). There is evidence, however, that the traditional savings practices were influential in some way in all of the groups.

**What are the conditions that enable blending to happen?**

What is significant is that the PPP strategy stimulated a great deal of motivation among the poorest sectors of rural Africa, the groups that are generally considered hopeless. The projects stimulated a great deal of self-help and generation of capital, albeit on a very small scale. Moreover, in its best cases, it continued after the donor help ceased and in Zambia it evolved into an NGO (Geran, 1996). We have argued that this happened largely because of the strategy of the PPP, an outside initiative, was so designed, whether consciously or not, that it set in motion the deeply rooted indigenous institutions and became part of those institutions. Because of the resources the PPP brought, the programme empowered and revitalised those institutions so that they could deal with the postcolonial structures even though the postcolonial power structures of Africa are an extension of the global power structure and work through the bureaucratic elite of African countries. It is not easy to reconstruct exactly how the PPP strategy set in motion the blending process, but from the data available and from direct experience of other similar activities, it appears that the following occurred:

1. The PPP chose to work with existing traditional social groupings in the communities and asked people in these groups to further define their problems and to make proposals for action. As we noted above, this was not the usual ‘command strategy’ of the centralised state planning offices and the people must have initially responded with some surprise and doubt.
defences of the weak are never to reveal their true identities or ideas (Scott, 1985). But in this case, perhaps because the programme was represented not by an outside figure by a local paraprofessional promoter, the people got into contact with their own deepest convictions and ideas and bring them out into the discussion with the others of the groups they were working with. At this point the indigenous preferences and areas of confidence began to come into play.

(2) The PPP chose to work with groups in interaction, encouraging discussion and encouraging the groups to move toward decisions. But the atmosphere of freedom and response enabled the people to define their problems from their own perspective and come up with solutions that they were convinced would work. Because they were interacting freely with their own people and the PPP was willing to work with their proposals as they made them, the people tended to interact in their own language and cultural discourse, not the strange discourse of Western modernisation. This brought out heir traditional culture even more because communication is so closely linked to culture as we have noted above.

(3) The PPP provided a structure that encouraged the groups to embark on income-generating projects, and there was enough promise of assistance to give them more assurance. But they were left free to select projects and the proposals were developed in the discourse of the people so that the groups tended to propose their rather traditional agricultural projects, traditional women's activities such as gardening and brewing of beer-activities that were always a social activity and as much a form of entertaining gathering as work. This also tended to bring into play their indigenous forms of capitalisation and accountability in the use of money. Of course, the fact that the PPP represented a kind of outside power structure, the recognition of the success of the groups by the PPP became an added source of pride in the traditional culture and traditional strategies.

(4) The PPP encouraged the people to work in groups and, if necessary, to form groups. But since the activities were being defined in terms of indigenous activities, the way the groups were formed was the traditional way of choosing leaders, the traditional way of demanding accountability and the traditional way of rewarding members and leaders for good work done. What the PPP did, however, was to encourage them to formalise these group commitments with byelaws and formal procedures of meetings and cooperative action in groups. These byelaws were still quite indigenous and represented a very significant form of blending.

(5) The PPP encouraged the groups to carry out a kind of experimentation with new practices. There was a great deal of discussion in the groups about improved productivity. In fact, this kind of discussion about what practices work the best has always been part of the indigenous discourse, but the presence of trained group promoters and the representatives of the extension systems within the benign, concerned culture of the PPP brought a new aura of scientific experimentation and introduced many new concepts of
technical agricultural productivity. Yet this was still in the native ground of the indigenous discourse. Again, this was a form of blending.

(6) Finally, the PPP brought training, but in response to the requests of the people when the people wanted it and in the form that the people wanted it. Much of the training was done in the villages and with the promoters who were permanent residents in he villages. In Tanzania, the bureaucracy got control of the PPP and channelled it into the support of the institutions of the bureaucracy, not the support of the indigenous institutions and groups of the peasant farmers as happened in Zambia, Sierra Leone and in Ghana. Not surprisingly, the Tanzanian project disappeared as soon as the donor funding was finished.

The role of African cultural 'root paradigms' in the cultural process of blending.

The six points listed above describe the response to an outside strategy which led the people back into the indigenous culture which is sustainable and congruous with the history, environment and culture of Africa. This external stimulus, however, set in motion an internal response which followed the internal pathways of the indigenous culture. This process activated the core of the indigenous culture which Victor Turner (1974) has called the root paradigm of the culture (Biernatizki, 1991: 24). Root paradigms compare closely with what Pierre Bourdieu (1977) has termed 'habitus', Clifford Geertz, in his study of local knowledge, (1983), 'common sense' and Edward T. Hall (1983) calls 'the primary level of culture'. A premise of these authors is that cultures tend to form integrated systems of meanings and values which are organised around a basic set of values. In certain contexts individuals will tend to fall back on these fundamental values.

Many authors argue that the core values of African culture give precedence to the community over the individual. Certainly, there is much evidence that the community puts many constraints on the individual to share what one has to pay school fees of all in the family, to meet expenses of sickness, to send back remittance to one's family and village, to sponsor clinics and schools back in one's village and a host of other demands. The concept of root paradigm, developed by the cultural anthropologist, Victor Turner (1974), explains how a series of mechanisms come into play to bring the individual to live in accordance with the basic ethos of a culture.

Actors are more likely to check back to the basic behavioural guidelines in a moment of significant socio-political change or when a nation embarks on a new endeavour and there are no clear behavioural guidelines. In these times of change, actors, especially central leading actors, tend to go back to the basic template of the culture to see what will be generally acceptable to people, what kind of symbols should be used to get people to understand what is involved, and what will stimulate people's motivations. Actors are continually trying to stimulate their motivations with symbols their own personalities will respond to. The 1980s and early 1990s were times of great uncertainty in Africa and the PPP was one of the many new programmes opening up in Africa. The PPP was sufficiently different to bring into play a reference back to the root paradigm of the culture.
A first mechanism of the root paradigm of a culture is the way an individual is socialised into the culture so that the basic motivational structure of a person who has grown up in that culture is activated to respond. The degree to which the traditional socialisation has taken place in a person in Africa, varies a great deal, but because of this one learns to desire and find satisfaction in certain activities and one expects these value responses from other persons. People in the PPP programme would tend to move toward blended activities because they find more satisfying the interactions and activities of their indigenous culture but an indigenous culture that is incorporating new technical elements. In so far as cultures are more communalistic, the kind of traditional group cooperation that the PPP encouraged would be more satisfying to most rural African people.

A second mechanism of the root paradigm is to develop a tendency to move toward situations with more secure support from others around one. Africa in the 1980s and early 1990s was going through an extremely turbulent, insecure period economically, politically and culturally. It was the period when the HIV/AIDS pandemic was the most terrifying, the structural adjustment programmes were cutting out government assistance, the wholesale redundancy of millions of people from government and industrial jobs was leaving many destitute and there was a rapid increase of population. In some countries this was a time of civil wars. In such a context, people tend to fall back on the traditional family and clan cooperative arrangements. The informal economy in both rural and urban Africa became the source of income of up to 60 or 70 per cent of the people. This desperate search for solutions was a factor in the blending that was going on in the culture of rural communities.

A third mechanism of the root paradigm influence in cultural pathways is to fall back on one’s core identity, especially when there is greater political, economic and cultural uncertainty. When one cannot be certain of the people, social context and values around one, there is a tendency to find support in one’s internal sense of identity. The PPP encouraged people to go back to their basic identity and to build on those values.

A fourth mechanism of a root paradigm is to make available a series of symbols which are an exterior representation of the experience that generated a certain value or set of values in the paradigm. For example, the early experience of Christianity with the death and resurrection of Christ generated the cross as a exterior symbol of the root paradigm of Christianity. For those who are deeply socialised into values of Christianity and have had some experience of the cross, the visual symbol of the cross renews the commitment to the values of the paradigm. In the best of the PPP projects, the groups and the projects they generated appear to have become symbols which linked the communalistic values in the personality of the participants with the programme itself. This helps to explain why the PPP or the groups that were promoted in Zambia and in Sierra Leone continued on after the end of the involvement of the donors and the government promoting agency.

A fifth mechanism of root paradigms are the rituals which are public enactments of the values of the paradigm on the part of all the major actors of a group or community that holds that paradigm. In Africa, funerals, weddings, graduations
from school or village celebrations are rituals in which the value commitments are repeated and renewed publicly. Ties to family and community are renewed on these occasions. The data on the PPP did not explicitly mention these rituals, but each meeting of the group and the training courses were in some sense the ritual re-enactment of the meaning of the PPP and its links to the root paradigm of African village culture.

Cultural blending as a continual process of mixture

It would be wrong, in my analysis, to see blending as a process of returning to a traditional African culture of the past. I would argue that Africa is made up of many cultures and is a continually changing mixture. The *mestizajes* theory of Martin-Barbero explaining the cultural process in Latin America is helpful in understanding this aspect of blending (1993). Latin American social analysis was long dominated by the theories of cultural imperialism which assumed that Western culture, especially that of the US in the case of Latin America, was imposing itself through the Western domination of the media and that Latin America cultures would be obliterated by Europe and America. The many field studies of emerging urban cultures in Latin America showed that, in fact, the emerging cultures, especially in the peripheries of the huge cities of Sao Paulo, Mexico City, and Bogota - the site of immigrant 'popular classes' - were a mixture of many cultures. Yes, there are elements of the US mass media culture, but also present are elements of the traditional indigenous cultures and currents of various regions of Latin America. The elites may have reflected more the cultures of the West, but popular classes are actively creating a culture out of many elements. Martin-Barbero used the metaphor of racial mixtures--Spanish, indigenous, African and many other racial backgrounds--so typical of Latin America to describe the kind of cultures that the people are creating. The popular serial fiction television programmes, the telenovela, which is so much a mixture of images from all corners of Latin America, represents the articulation of this continually changing mixture of cultural elements.

If one wants to catch the heart of African culture, especially in rural areas, one has only to listen to the great variety of musical styles and musical tastes that one can hear on any radio station in Africa. There is virtually every musical style of the world present, and the young people of Africa have learned to love them all. Likewise, if one analyses the cultural values expressed in the action of PPP groups, one can find something of so many different cultural currents crossing the face of Africa. In the end, Africans are picking and choosing from many sources to construct a culture which works in the midst of often difficult circumstances.

A ritual, expressive model of communication

Part of the difficulty in understanding the blending process is the lingering influence of the linear, Lasswell model of communication which was part of the traditional extension system of communication and which is still taught as 'the' model of communication in many African schools of communication. In the linear
model of development communication, the ideas originate in urban-technical technical experts, an extension of the Western world, and are imposed on a rural population. The mode is persuasion. The rural population remains passive and often quietly uninvolved and resistant. They have nothing to contribute. A better description of the process of communication present in the PPP is the ritual, expressive model (Carey, 1989). This can also be called an 'expressive' model since its emphasis to a large extent on the intrinsic satisfaction of the people participating rather than on some instrumental purpose (McQuail, 1994:51). In African rituals of marriage, giving a name to a child or honouring a member of a family, all join in the dance, the singing and the gestures of mutual bonding. As was noted above, a ritual is a renewal of commitment, a renewal of sentiments of affection, a renewal of the right to participate of all. This ritual, expressive model of communication invites the ideas and contribution of all. Where this more expressive involvement is present, group action is more self-reliant and sustainable (Uphoff et al, 1998)

The blending model as increasingly dominant in Africa

The blending conception of communication is increasingly replacing the earlier linear models. Making the intended beneficiaries active partners in their development initiatives is considered to be a better option as it is likely to help put the management of development initiatives in the hands of rural people. The model of respecting the innovative role of rural people that is promoted in Beyond Farmer First (1994) is becoming a widely adopted in the agricultural universities in Africa. The blending concept is also implicit in what Uphoff et al (1998) call a shift from a concept of foreign aid to one of 'development cooperation'. NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development ) also is moving away from the dependence and aid binomial that has continued to shackle African development efforts.

In the political sphere, a new wave of Afro-centric writers is beginning to revisit Africa's democratic heritage. They are arguing for a system of democracy based on what Osabu-Kle (2000) calls jaku democracy. Jaku democracy is considered to be the missing link in Africa's political development. Osabu-Kle contends that the Western pattern of democracy that is being imposed on Africans in return for aid and endorsement is failing because it is not based on the true African democracy which is based on all parties deliberating together for the well-being of the nation. The more remote model is that of the palaver of village communities in which all participate to seek the solution of some problem that the whole community suffers. This is close to the model of ujamaa which Nyerere proposed as the kind of social democracy that is closer to the root paradigm of African culture. In jaku democracy there are no political parties and every clan or ethnic group selects its representative based on merit arrived at by observing the candidates right from their childhood. Osabu-Kle discusses four typical African political systems: (1) The Ovimbunda; (2) the Zulu; (3) the Ashanti; and (4) the Ga political systems. These operated under a strict system of accountability, demanding that political office-holders live up to expectations of the community. Otherwise they would be deposed before the completion of their terms of office. Osabu-Kle argues that there is need for a process
of blending in the way democracy is practised today in Africa if governments wish to succeed. This was emphasised by former U. N. Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, in his address to African leaders in Benin’s capital, Cotonou, in 2000. In that address Mr. Annan expressed the need to incorporate some traditional African practices in the continent’s democratic process (Annan, 2000).

The Implications of the Blending Model for Rural Development in Africa

Although the blending model of communication for rural development has many implications, I would like, in the form of a conclusion, to indicate three of them as particularly central: (1) the clarification of the role of technical development support (what we have in the past called ‘extension agents’), (2) the reduction of costs of rural development and (3) increasing the sustainability of rural development efforts.

Clarifying the role of technical development support

The revolution in thinking about the role the urban-technical sector in rural development has redefined the ‘extension agent’ as a catalyst and an agent of empowerment of the rural people. In much of the literature, however, the role of catalyst and even empowerment remains very vague. The discovery in this study that the cultural blending process is central to outside intervention suggests that being a catalyst and an agent of empowerment is above all making a blending process possible.

The development support agent in the postcolonial societies of Africa remains a quite powerful figure. What was apparently different in the PPP programme was that the technical support personnel acted to transfer power to rural communities by defending them from the ruling elite of the state and by opening a space of freedom for rural communities to come forth with their own ideas and their own local knowledge. Furthermore, the technical support validated the indigenous knowledge, organization, forms of income-generating projects, forms of capital generation, experimentation, marketing and virtually every aspect of the projects of the action groups. In doing this, the roots of indigenous capacity which the people knew well sprouted, grew and blossomed. Particularly important was the freedom to operate according to traditional forms of organisation and leadership selection.

More important, the technical support personnel in the role of paraprofessional group promoter introduced improved technology in response to the questions and requests of the local leadership. Thus, the new was not a foreign substitution, but reinforced and strengthened the indigenous institutions of the people. The people not only remained in control at all times, but became more and more adept in analysing their own problems and devising technical solutions to these problems. In responding to the requests of the people, the technical support acknowledged their own ignorance and joined with the people in a dialogical form of communication seeking the best solution in the production systems of rural communities. The
technical support personnel also knew how to step back and let the logic of the root paradigm of the people’s culture take its course and define the kind of rural life and society the people wanted. Thus, the development process was driven by the root paradigm of the people, not by the ideal of becoming Europeans or Americans.

Reducing the costs of rural development

Many evaluations of current policy of rural development have criticised the over funding of projects and the proliferation of projects that are not cost-effective (Korten and Uphoff, 1982; Uphoff et al, 1998). Often these projects are motivated primarily by the desire to create jobs for the urban-technical governing elite. Much funding has led beneficiaries to greater dependence on aid money or has led to misuse of funds by project officials. Korten and Uphoff (1982) observe that the equation of ‘money spent equals development done’ is erroneous. Uphoff et al (1998: 171) conclude, ‘We should by now be wary of any suggestion that development is something that can be ‘done’ especially by anyone from outside the country or even outside the rural sector’.

The strategy of blending enables the people to take initiatives on their own and to activate their indigenous capacity for income-generation and devising new production systems. The model of responding to initiatives of the people, focuses the use of resources on precisely the needs of the people in a particular time and place. It means that the resources will be used by the people for their purposes. The blending model does not glorify the capacities of the people but sets in motion a process of self-criticism which enables them to see that they do need to structure and to extend their indigenous organisations much more. The major problem for most rural income-generating projects is that these are not connecting with regional, urban and foreign resource and export systems. Most rural people living with their traditional gardening and crafts know only how to take their produce to the roadside but do not understand how to link with marketing systems. A minimal amount of training and organisation enables them to blend their production capacity with a broader distribution and marketing system. In the Zambian project, the local organisations formed their own district and regional support systems which were more efficient than an expensive government extension service.

Insuring sustainability

The classic model of external aid is to provide funding for a ‘pilot project’ which gives jobs to technical personnel, but is unsustainable and disappears as soon as the donor agency finishes the support. The blending strategy attempts no more than to strengthen and extend the income-generation activities of rural action groups that already exist in most rural areas of Africa and will probably continue to exist in the informal economy sector. Unfortunately, many of the host governments did not see clearly the blending strategy and implemented the programme from the perspective of the traditional extension system. In these cases, the programme turned out to be enormously expensive and disappeared with the funding. In the cases where the
Blending new technology with local, indigenous cultures

programme continued after donor funding finished, there was emphasis on keeping the indigenous income-generating activities but expanding the indigenous groups into an autonomous district and regional resource and marketing structure.

A final question. Did the PPP and the empowering of local knowledge and local show that it is a significant strategy for helping Africa become self-sustaining in food production? One might argue that the PPP was just a new version of the old extension system, increasing productivity. Often, it was not entirely clear that increasing productivity is not enough and that what rural programmes need is better marketing and post-harvest processing capacity. Indigenous groups will increase their production if they can find good markets and reasonable prices for this (Ponte, 2002).

As a final remark, what was conspicuously absent from the PPP and the blending process it generated in some cases was the use of local and regional educational, community media. Community media operates at the district and regional level to sustain a process of reflection and problem solving beyond the immediate traditional neighbourhood groups and makes people conscious of themselves as not just an isolated action group but part of a larger district and regional organization.

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Nollywood films as a site for constructing contemporary African identities: 
The significance of village ritual scenes in Igbo films

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Abstract

Many reasons have been advanced as to why the video film industry in Nigeria has been so successful financially and in building loyal audiences among Africans around the world. The present article argues that Nollywood films attract by providing a time and place for resolving deep-felt tensions between life in an increasingly modern, Western and urban world and a longing for an authentic African identity. The way video films are produced - getting ideas from people's everyday talk, producing intuitively on location and responding to an immediate market - brings these films close to the most emotional questions Nigerians and other Africans are asking. The typical action of many video films begins with the lust for power, luxurious wealth and pleasure in the city, but then returns to the village for purification and forgiveness. At the heart of the resolution of the action, especially in the Igbo films, are the continually recurring, traditional rituals of reaffirming identity in the village.

The success of Nigerians such as Chinua Achebe in the novel and Wole Soyinka with drama is well known. Less well-known is the struggle and failure of Nigerian film makers from the 1960s to the early 1990s. They never managed to produce more than three or four films a year with celluloid stock, and these never attracted a popular response. Then with the switch to video film technology around 1990, there was a move to a quite different genre, aesthetic tone, viewing context, and marketing strategy. Films officially passed by the Nigerian film censorsip board quickly rose from 3 in 1994 to 233 in 1996, 389 in 1999, 712 in 2000, 1018 in 2002 and 1711 in 2005. By 2004 the film industry in Nigeria had gained its title as Nollywood.

The reasons for this success are complex. It is the thesis of this paper, however, that the attraction of the video film for the Nigerian people and for other Africans lies in its closeness to the life of the people - in the source of its stories, the way it is financed and produced and the way it is distributed. More specifically, the success of the home video, it is argued, is that its drama is the place for resolving the...
contradictions of meaning and the tensions between modern, national, global identities and village, tribal, regional and authentically African identities. The problem which sets in motion the dramatic action is often in the urban context where most Nigerians and, increasingly, most Africans live. A constantly recurring theme is the unbounded search for wealth, power and pleasure punished or dethroned, finally, by the gods of the authentic Nigerian, African identity. These themes are not unlike those of the *telenovela* in Latin America or serial fiction in other postcolonial societies - and Nigerians share so many of the contradictions of the wider postcolonial world. In the Nigerian and African context, however, the reconciliation of these contradictions of meaning are so frequently found in the village and, in particular, in the village rituals. The video film has become a stage on which is portrayed for Nigerian audiences how the values and rituals of the village, the roots of African culture, can be spelled out in an authentically African way in an increasingly urban and global context.

That the home video has become such an important site for meaning creation for millions of Nigerians and other Africans is very much related to the economics of home video production and the material conditions of life in Nigeria. The love of cinema is deeply imbedded in Nigerian culture, and to understand this we must take at least a quick glance at the importance of cinema, popular theatre and other forms of entertainment in the Nigerian rhythm of life.

**Cinema in Nigerian cultural history**

Nigerians have been fascinated with cinema ever since the first film was shown in Lagos in 1903, the coronation of King Edward VII at Westminster. A local newspaper, *The Lagos Standard*, commented that it attracted thousands of people in Lagos and 'came as a welcome relief to the dull monotony of the town, the amusements of which are few and far between' (cited in Mgbejume, 1989: 22). By 1914 there were several cinemas in Lagos, and in the 1920s five or more cinema halls were presenting films every evening. A local newspaper observed that 'crowds of anxious young men and women were always waiting at the theatres for the doors to open' (Mgbejume, 1989: 28). In 1935, the Edgar Rice Burroughs film, *Sanders of the River*, was shot partly in Nigeria and featured the Nigerian Orlando Martins (1899-1985), acting alongside Paul Robeson from America. This created considerable interest in film making in Nigeria (Aderinokun, 2005).

After 1945 the 'movies' became the principal evening entertainment in Lagos and other Nigerian towns. Cinema halls multiplied in Lagos and in 1951 seating capacity was estimated to be around 34,000 with annual attendance about 3,500,000 (Mgbejume, 1989: 29). The cost was only six pence and young Nigerians crowded into the cinema halls, not to watch quietly, but to participate boisterously in the screen action.

The styles, story lines and modes of production of today's video films also have their roots in the popular theatre tradition in Nigeria (Barber, 2000). In the 1950s and 1960s there were more than one hundred theatre troupes in the Yoruba region alone travelling from village to village for evening entertainment. These included Wole
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Soyinka's Mbari Mbayo cultural group and Hubert Ogunde's troupe. (Aderinokun, 2005). In the 1980s some of these stage presentations began to use short film projections to portray with greater effect the splendour of kingly courts, magical transformations, the intrigue of good and evil spirits, and the outrageously wealthy living of the new Nigerian rich. Then came the inexpensive video technology of the late 1980s, and the stage presentations went totally into video film production. The people loved it even more and Nollywood was created!

The production process is close to the everyday life of the people

The blockbuster film, Living in Bondage, produced by the Igbo, Kenneth Nnebue, dealt with the conflict of greed for wealth and family commitments. This introduced a style of film which dealt with the typical value contradictions of Nigerians. As the number of films increased, film makers began to take every drama-filled dilemma of Nigerian life as a topic to explore and explain. To understand how video film is a medium for creating new cultural answers to everyday questions about life in Africa, it is helpful to briefly describe how a video film is produced and how the ideas for a film are found.

Home video producers live close to the people and produce films at the local neighbourhood and regional city level. Producers are not part of a large company, but have individual production offices in most of the major cities in Nigeria like Surulere - Lagos, Idumota market in Lagos Island, and Onitsha in Anambra state. Most films are produced in an ad hoc fashion, recorded directly on VCDs, DVDs or the VHS tapes and sold in the local market places without recourse to any official distribution strategies. Nollywood film makers use digital video cameras and methods of shooting, editing and mass recording that are widely accessible. The films are shot on locations all over the country and show the nation's familiar landscape with distinct regional characteristics. In producing them, appeal is made to storylines that have resonance with people's life experiences and often-told myths. Producers draw on familiar genres of comedies, thrillers, romance, historic-epic, horror, mythic-parables and religio-morality tales to relate the socio-political situations of the people's living communities to audiences. All films draw on local folklore and familiar story lines from the days of live theatre, television and novels. This, according to Teshome, is a repetition of memories coming from people's relation to the land and community and passed on from generation to generation. These are memories of past collective struggles which offer an emancipatory 'horizon' for a liberated and alternative future (1989: 54).

As Egbon Esosa argues, 'finding concrete references to their own lives seems to be much more important to African viewers than to western film audiences. Even in the horror genre or in action films, Nigerian videos are clearly oriented toward everyday life in Africa. Traditional aspects such as magic and witchcraft are integrated into the plots just as much as car accidents and laptops' (2005). The idea of building on what is currently happening in Nigeria whether socially or politically is evident in most storylines. In Not Without My Daughter one observes the typical
tension that divides the Nigerian nation along the axis of ethnic/religious lines. The film is about a Muslim man and a Christian woman who had to go through so many obstacles in order to get married because they are of different religions and cultural backgrounds from the North and East of the country respectively. *The Stubborn Grasshopper* is based on the political story of the rise and tragic end of the late former head of State, Gen. Sani Abacha.

**Video films are produced with the home viewing context in mind**

The home video industry is part of a major shift in entertainment habits among Nigerians in the 1970s and 1980s. In the late colonial period most Nigerian entertainment was found in the public halls, often provided by the churches, in urban neighbourhoods and rural villages. The traveling theatre troupes took advantage of this preference for an 'evening outing'.

Beginning in the 1970s, going out at night was considered increasingly dangerous or inconvenient in the rainy season, and, at the same time, with the petro-naira boom, electricity networks expanded and more people could afford television sets and video players, often powered in the evenings by small private generators. There was more insecurity in public halls where there was and is constant failure of power supply. Many of the traveling troupes preferred to put their plays on television. The cinemas also became too expensive for most Nigerians. The indigenisation act of 1972 was intended to favor native Nigerian cultural production, but Nigerian celluloid films were difficult to finance and, without domestic production facilities, had to be sent abroad for final production. With structural adjustment policies and the devaluation of the naira, it became impossible to finance the final production of celluloid films in Britain. With so few Nigerian celluloid films being produced and increasing costs of maintenance, many of the cinema businesses collapsed.

As soon as the inexpensive video production technology became available in the late 1980s, there was a massive switch to this form by most of the theatre groups and by celluloid film makers. Today, there is group viewing in video clubs and cinema screenings in some major cities where cinema centres are gradually being resuscitated, but by far the most important context for viewing Nollywood films is in the home with family, friends and neighbours.

The cinema of the 1970s that emerged out of the Yoruba 'travelling' troupes tended to stress folkloric themes and it was designed to be projected on a large screen before an audience. Films of this era carried the viewers into another world. Among the significant films of this period of folkloric cinema that made use of traditional Yoruba fairy tales, magic and superstition were *Aiye*, (1980), directed by Ola Balogun and *Jaiyesimi* (1980) by Hubert Ogunde (Nwachukwu, 1994: 6). The styles of film directors such as Ola Balogun and Bankole Bello and popular Yoruba theatre stars such as Hubert Ogunde, Ade (Love) Folayan, and Moses Olaiya Adejumo (Diawara, 1988: 103) were, however, increasingly less interesting to Nigerians beginning to live in a new world fueled by the oil economy.

Ola Balogun’s *Amadi*, released right after the Nigerian civil war, represents
Nigeria’s past up to the pre-civil war days when Nigeria was one huge undivided house and Igbo musicians sang Yoruba highlife and Yoruba sang Hausa songs (Aderinokun, 2005). Amadi, as Aderinokun says, is an Igbo film made by a Yoruba man and is clearly an example of Nigerian art using the best of Western film techniques. At the time it was a breath of fresh air even though, due to low technology and budget constraints, it was unable to impress the market (Aderinokun, 2005).

Other films of that time apart from Amadi, were Bisi - Daughter of the River that captures the major aspects of Nigeria’s multicultural scenario on screen. Others were Dinner with the Devil by Sanya Dosunmu and Eddie Ugboh’s The Great Attempt. These films had many artistic qualities, but Nigerians wanted films much closer to their contemporary reality. Writing on Nollywood films eight years after his Black African Cinema (1994), Nwachukwu (2003) hints at the success of the new era of video production and its appeal to popular audiences that has transcended the limitations in the earlier celluloid film-making practices in Nigeria.

A shift in popular tastes began with television. In 1959 the country’s first television station began transmission from Ibadan, the capital of western Nigeria, now Oyo state (Nwachukwu, 1994: 114). By the middle of the 1980s, every state had set up its own television and radio broadcasting stations, and laws were introduced limiting foreign television content. This opened up a market for the cheaper and more rapidly produced video films. The first Nollywood film makers started by listening and observing what excited and interested people in ordinary conversation, and then finding a way to put that in a dramatic frame. Many ideas came from the successful novels, plays and television programmes. The producers of television started showing local popular drama, especially melodramatic serial fiction, typical emotion-laden 'soap operas'. Among the serialised drama programmes that began were the TV productions of Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart, which was hugely successful; the Aido family, Village headmaster, Cockcrow at Dawn, The Masquerade, Mirror in the Sun, Checkmate, Sura, the Tailor, Awada Kerikeri and Second Chance. Thus, popular tastes began to focus around drama programmes that dealt with the major cultural issues of regional cultures.

An aesthetics which resonates with the people's feelings

The film producers and directors of Nollywood very consciously try to attract home viewing audiences by incorporating symbolic scenes of the landscape, locality, attire, food, and music that have meanings close to the emotional life experiences of audiences. As Kunzler notes, when English is used, it is the Nigerian English which is more acceptable even to non Nigerians from other English speaking African countries than the Hollywood English (Kunzler, 2007). Commenting on the film, This is Nollywood, produced by a team of filmmakers from the States who wanted to learn more of the Nigerian film industry, Franco Sacchi, of the Centre for Digital Imaging Arts of Boston University, observes that 'Nollywood producers know they have struck a lucrative and long-neglected market - movies that offer audiences characters they can identify with in stories that relate to their everyday
lives. Western action-adventures and Bollywood musicals provide little that is relevant to life in African slums and remote villages. Nollywood stars are native Nigerians. Nollywood settings are familiar. Nollywood plots depict situations that people understand and confront daily; romance, comedy, the occult, crooked cops, prostitution, and HIV/AIDS' (2005). In the view of Bob Manuel Udokwu interviewed in the course of the Dublin African Film Festival in 2007 (21/4/07), 'whatever message one has to put across is such that the interest of the people has to be drawn to it. The stories that come out of Nollywood essentially represent the lifestyles or what you might call cultures and traditions and the general life experiences of the people'.

The economics of home video also flow from Nigerian culture

The financing of film production in Nigeria also oriented Nigerian film toward a popular expression rather than an elite artistic film. Film production in the Francophone African countries received a significant boost from the financial assistance offered by the governments of France and, to a lesser extent, of Belgium as a support for the French language and culture (Magombe, 1997: 670). The case was different in the Angolphone parts of Africa where the British were less interested in promoting education in the field of cinematography (Nwachukwu, 1994: 68). In the English-speaking areas of West Africa producers had to find their own financing. The new national governments of English-speaking Africa never had the resources to support an art film industry. By the late 1980s the celluloid film industry was almost finished because of the lack of finances (Nwachukwu, 1994: 114).

The government of Nigeria did not get involved in sponsoring Nollywood movies apart from regulating the industry's work through the film censors' board, and the producers of video films were not anxious to be close to the unpopular, repressive and dictatorial governments in Nigeria. The organizers of The Nollywood Project in Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, highlighting this point, state that 'the most significant consequence of Nollywood entrepreneurial origins is the autonomy it affords. The industry has never received any significant support from the Nigerian government. Neither is it dependent on support from the foreign interests that cultivate the Palme d'Or aesthetics commonly associated with the canonical films of African cinema studies. It has arisen free of the dogmas of cultural development programmes and adheres to no conditions or regulation beyond ownership of the most ordinary kind' (2005). Producers do not depend on financiers who can dictate the content and aesthetics but operate independently using the latest mass-marketed technologies as soon as these become affordable. All editing, music, and other post-production work is done with common computer-based systems, and films go straight to DVD and VCD disks (This is Nollywood, 2005).

In order to cut down costs, home video producers try to find natural locations that suit the story line. Bob Manuel Udokwu in the 2007 interview cited above (21/4/07) indicated this when he said, 'Of course, we build sets. Sometimes we use existing structures like beautiful houses which are modern day stories that people actually built; flashy cars that are actually owned by our people; and not some
computer generated stuff. So Nollywood is part and parcel of the people's life and there is no way you can remove the stories from the culture of the people'. Home video producers have a way of bringing into the films the current themes and locales of the villages and towns they use or represent. At times these ideas are taken from the national or regional press, the television soaps or some political and social situation in the country. Some also originate from life stories of individuals and tales of the myths of villages.

The funding to pay actors and production crews comes from individual sponsors, often personal friends and acquaintances who come from the same village or even members of extended families who are successful business men. They invest in the production with the hope of recouping gains, but also to see their people, their region and even their village projected on video screens. Video film production is part of the vast informal economy of Africa that avoids the banks because of high interest rates and demands for collateral, and seeks to market products directly so that profits will come to the small entrepreneurs and their backers. The 'Nollywood actor, Richard Mofe Damijo, popularly called RMD', referred to this in a personal interview (21/4/07) stating that 'most of the sponsors of Nollywood are what the New York Times or Washington Post calls merchant-investors. We call them traders...the Igbo traders. They are those who discovered the industry and who are nurturing it and sponsoring it'.

Debates on how much time and money a production takes in Nollywood has attracted much curiosity. In introducing his reason for making the documentary film, This is Nollywood, Franco Sacchi, a lecturer at the Center of Digital Imaging Arts at Boston University, tells of his fascination with how Nollywood films are produced with such a small amount of money compared to other mainstream cinemas. 'When I first read about Nigerian directors producing hundreds of feature-length films with digital cameras, in only a week, and with a few thousand dollars, I found the subject irresistible' he said. 'Unlike Hollywood and Bollywood, Nollywood movies are made on shoe-string budgets of time and money. An average production takes just 10 days and costs approximately $15,000' (2005). Remarking on the success of the documentary which graphically tells Nollywood's story on screen, which was the main reason for their coming to Nigeria from the States, Franco Sacchi attests, 'we experience the world of Nollywood through acclaimed director Bond Emeruwa's quest to make a feature-length action film in just nine days. Armed only with a digital camera, two lights, and about $20,000, Bond faces challenges unimaginable in Hollywood and Bollywood' (2005).

The low cost of some very successful films is well known, but, in fact, salaries paid to popular actors, good directors and other top people in the industry are going up. Methods of production are getting more sophisticated, and the number of people involved in some productions is increasing rapidly.

Statistics are always hard to come by in Nigeria. It is especially difficult to find out how much a particular film cost to be produced. Interviews with Nigerian actors and directors are always evasive about salaries paid or other production costs. This is a personal and secretive matter typical of all Nigerian businesses. Mildred Okwo, a producer and director herself, found this evasiveness in an interview with Uche
Nworah regarding his film, *30 Days*. 'I really don’t know the true answer to this question', he stated, 'because the Nigerian film industry tends to be so close-mouthed about their business dealings. I have heard that it ranges between one million and 10 million naira (US$ 10,000-100,000). But then again, a film like Jeta Amata's *Amazing Grace* costs so much more than that. So your guess is as good as mine'. Bob Manuel Udokwu, himself a producer in Nollywood, repeated the same view in my personal interview with him. 'The people who are financing these films in Nigeria are mere business men, entrepreneurs who want to make money. There is some element of secrecy. They are the people who know how many copies of their films are produced and how many are sold. They do not let that out to the general public so that people don’t think they made a hell of a lot of money. But the framework the censors’ body is trying to put in place has some kind of mechanism to determine how many copies of a film are sold over a particular period of time' (21/4/07).

A marketing system that reaches the home viewing context

Nigerian home videos somehow find their way around the globe. The films are well distributed everywhere within and outside of Nigeria. Haynes remarks that 'the export of Nigerian films has been remarkable, even if most of the profits do not end up in the right hands. They are on television in Namibia and on sale on the streets in Kenya. In the Congo, the sound is turned down while an interpreter tells the story in Lingala or other languages. In New York, Chinese people are buying them. In Holland, Nollywood stars are recognized on the streets by people from Suriname, and in London they are hailed by Jamaicans' (Haynes, 2000). Corroborating this view is Aderinokun who states that 'Nollywood audiences are also scattered all over the world. Every film in Nigeria has a potential audience of fifteen million people within the country and about five million outside; but these statistics may be somewhat conservative considering that half of West Africa’s 250 million people are Nigerians and, according to the World Bank records, slightly over seven million Nigerians are scattered around the world, most of them in the developed economies' (Aderinokun, 2005).

How to reach these audiences is where Nollywood departs significantly from the old routes of distribution. The international film distribution system, dominated by US-based agencies, has for long controlled the distribution of films even in Nigeria. Many of the celluloid films produced by Nigerians in the 1970s and 1980s could not get access to cinemas in Nigeria. This distribution system deprived Africa from seeing most ‘African films’. Home video producers have circumvented this system entirely and have created avenues of reaching audiences through local market distributors. In addition to the rental shops and movie stores dedicated to selling the films, the Internet is another channel that aids the circulation and distribution of Nollywood products. Where advertisements in the print media (newspapers, magazines, posters, and fliers), radio and television could not reach, the Internet provides a new open channel where Nigerian films are discussed, reviewed and sold to fans across the globe. Even for the Diaspora outside of Nigeria, the videos move as part of travelers’ luggage. Ofeimum notes that ‘since Nigerians travel a lot, their
video films have also been travelling with them (Ofeimum, 2003). Kunzler believes that for Nigerians around the world home videos 'help them cope with nostalgia' (2007).

Livingstone's description of family use of television, if today it is less characteristic of British or American television viewing, fits video film consumption in Igboland and other parts of Nigeria. For her television, and I would add, video technology, have come to dominate the hours in our day, the organisation of our living rooms, the topics of our conversations, our conceptions of pleasure, the things to which we look forward, the way we amuse and occupy our children, and the way we discover the world we live in (2002). In Nigeria, 'the film viewer watches, as if through a window, an action between a group of protagonists. He/she experiences the desires, frustrations, pleasures and satisfaction of these characters in the represented action as if they are in the place of the character, in the action being depicted' (Le Grice, 2001: 245).

So, what is the attraction of Nigerian home videos?

The home video films present much of the contemporary Nigerian quest for a share of the oil money and other wealth: luxurious homes, beautiful clothing, large and fast cars, the sexual intrigues, the struggle of economic titans, the undercurrent of corruption but also the taste of money that the corruption brings. Evident, too, is the violence that bubbles under the surface of Nigerian life, but too often comes out into the open. At times, the themes of the home videos do not seem to be too different from the news splashed across the tabloids that are sold along the streets. For the great majority of Nigerians living in grinding poverty, families cramped into one room with survival incomes, the garish wealth is a feast of the eyes. Brian Larkin's account of how a Hausa audience, coming from a quite strict Muslim background, views the home video, In da so, is worth quoting:

'Much of the action of In da so takes place in rich, comfortable houses of the new elites that mimic the contemporary iconography and settings of Bombay cinema and Lagos-based videos such as Glamour Girls. The youths with whom I watched the video kept up a running commentary on the furnishings, carpets, condition of the cars, and clothes the characters wore. In an interview Ado Ahmad told me he paid the main actress a bonus for every different outfit she wore during filming. When he later screened the video in Sokoto, one audience member counted the number of outfits she wore. “Some people are only interested in clothes,” Ahmed shrugged.' (Larkin, 2000: 235)

There are, however, deeper cultural issues in the attraction of home videos. Currently, according to Haynes (2000) and Nwachukwu (2003), home video thrives because of its commercial vitality and its ability to appeal to the major ethnic divides of the Nigerian nation. On this note Haynes and Okome argue that in the aggregate the video-films do remarkable job of conveying the country's immensity and diversity. With the huge population of Nigeria and the variances in most cultural traditions, 'ethnicity' is a big issue in some of the films (2000: 88). For Nwachukwu
'those produced in the North reflect the Hausa, Islamic and other cultures of the Northern states; the Igbo films are produced in South East, and utilise the tradition of Igbo theatre practices; while the Yoruba films, which are produced in the South West, mirror the ethnic tradition of the Yoruba travelling theatre' (2003: 135). One here sees the most fundamental forms in which the Nigerian nation is imagined in popular as well as officially sponsored culture today (Haynes, 2000: 36).

With its dominance of contemporary Nigerian entertainment today (Haynes, 2000: xv), the industry has the licence to re-enact people's stories by applying the interlocking elements of cultural heritage, employment of the fund of Nigerian imagery, ritual-spiritual language, music, dance, metaphors, proverbs, mythic components and poetic resonances of oral traditions (Nwachukwu, 1994: 202). The attractiveness of Nollywood products, I would argue, lies in the home video producers' understanding of the relationship of the symbolism of Nigerian everyday life and the underlying desires, hopes, anxieties and frustrations of life. Home video producers are so close to their audiences that they know what gives people pleasure. With the strong commercial instincts of people in the informal economy, they are not concerned simply with what gives themselves pleasure, as producers of art films might be, but what gives their market pleasure. This is considerably more complex, however, than simple commercial acumen. It is a sense of the Nigerian aesthetic tradition which is part of Nigerian culture and has found its expression in the Nollywood aesthetic and the Nollywood storylines.

Using the new media technologies, the industry has become a 'splace' (read 'space' and 'place') of a sort where major questions of values and meanings of life are taken up and projected before the public to raise awareness of the self-portrait of the nation's journey as a people. As Garritano clearly puts it 'the Nigerian video film industry is cogently a force that strives to shape the norms of the culture that it is an active participant in' (2000: 171). Thus, Nollywood is an industry that explores the limits of social conventions with films that are allegories of cultural and economic transformation caused by modernisation processes (Kunzler, 2007).

**Pleasure in the ritual process**

I have found Victor Turner's explanation of the pleasures of theatre, film and television as a ritual process to be particularly helpful in understanding the pleasures of home video audiences (1969, 1974, 1982). Certainly, there are many useful explanatory theories of this phenomenon, but the ritual process is very illuminating even of my own experience of home video, in part, because Nigerian culture and Igbo culture in particular is a continuous series of rituals. People express in rituals what moves them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalised and obligatory, it is the values of the group that are revealed (Uzukwu, 1997: 41). These include festivals and activities of communities that are symbolically celebrated and become an integral part of Igbo rhythm of life and Igbo personalities. For instance, the funeral rites of titled men and women, new yam festivals, initiation rites of young adults, naming ceremony of new-born babies, breaking of kola nuts, title-making ceremonies and dozens of other ritual events are all cultural rituals that the Igbos
celebrate with symbolic rites full of significant meanings.

Turner derived his conception of the ritual process from his anthropological studies of the rites of passage of the Ndembe people of North Western Zambia and his interpretation of the insights of Arnold van Gennep regarding rites of passage. Turner's interest in cognitive anthropology led him to explain the ritual process as a general form of a culture's coping with structures of power and the attempt to balance institutions of power with commitment to community. Ritual is a place where we can integrate short-term pragmatic goals and the longer-range mythic values of a culture, where we can replace personal alienation with an affirmation of personal identity. In Turner's view, every society's attempt to mobilise itself to solve its broader societal problems leads to an emphasis on authoritarian institutions, creation of status differentiation, justification of the concentration of power and inequality, reward of individual ambition, technical knowledge and other forms of 'structure' (1969-1995: 106-107). Structure may be necessary, but it also generally produces conflict, alienation and oppression.

Turner argues that most cultures balance the over-emphasis on structure with a periodic deep experience of community which emphasises social leveling, concern for the needs of others in the community and personal identity. The purpose of the rites of passage among the Ndembe, in his view, are to impress young people with their duties to the community and recall to those assuming positions of chieftaincy that they should not use their power for their own interests but to serve the whole community. In Turner's interpretation, there are three moments in the ritual process: leaving the realm of structure, entering into a symbolic experience of community which is deeply emotional and pleasurable and then returning to the context of structure with a sense of social values. It is, as Real observes, celebratory, consumatory, (an end in itself) and decorative rather than utilitarian in aim and often requires some element of 'performance' for communication to be realized (1996: 48). Turner characterises this experience of community as 'liminal' (from the Latin limen or threshold of a door), that is, as an experience that is on the threshold between utopian communal happiness and the practicalities of structure in everyday life.

Certainly, Nigerians experience in everyday life the worst aspects of 'structure': the brutal assertion of dictatorial government, the use of public office for personal gain, the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a few, the neglect of public services because these are used for personal interests and a litany of other familiar abuses. The typical home video viewer watches, in the protected environment of family and friends, another idealistic scenario in which greed and oppression are punished, the person serving the community is at least honored and the weak get some respite. Thus, cultural rituals have two references: backward to convention, habit, agreement and established order and forward to indicate the immediate and soon-to-be realized social significance of this underlying order (Rothenbuhler, 1998: 14).

What has impressed me, however, is the ability of the producers of home video to marshall the familiar symbolic language of Nollywood, especially the portrayal of ritual scenes, to provide an experience of communal liminality (Animalu, 1990: 46). Before examining how this ritual symbolism is found in four Igbo video films-the
dramatisation of Chinua Achebe’s novel, *Things Fall Apart*, Nnebue’s *Living in Bondage*, *Ofala I and II*, and *Widow*, I would like to indicate at least briefly what are considered to be the major characteristics of the aesthetic style of many Nigerian home videos.

**The Nollywood aesthetic**

There has been considerable comment that the aesthetic of Nollywood films is quite different from the Hollywood dynamics of pleasure (Brereton, 2005; Taylor, 1989: 98; Diawara, 1989). The discussion of the Nollywood aesthetic is, obviously, a major study in itself, but I would suggest the importance of seven commonly discussed aspects of the filmic language of the 'Third cinema' and which I think are important in the aesthetic of the home video: emphasis on cultural identities, the use of symbols of 'memorability', the portrayal of the vastness of nature, the presentation of persons as one with the environment, the premise of the unity and connectedness of the inanimate, animate and spiritual world, and the assumed communalistic nature of human existence.

**The emphasis on cultural identities**

Willemen argues that the film in Western culture 'starts with a hero, develops with a hero and ends with hero...Any other character, place or decor is recognised and made visible only in relation to the hero' (1998: 60). The development of the personal values of the hero is what is important.

In Nollywood aesthetics, the individual is presented as part of a culture and the symbols of that culture are highlighted. As Diawara notes in his discussion of 'Third Cinema', cultural identities and symbolisations shape the narrative devices (1988: 144). Nollywood films present cultural symbols that resonate with audiences by telling stories of where characters are coming from and where they are going (Adediji, 1971:134). The ancestors in the past are referred to and symbolic community personages are leading the audience into the future. And this is what audiences want to see in the films and re-create in their memories. Culture therefore is one essential edifice upon which most Nollywood filmic storylines are set. Indigenous as they are, they 'reach out to create a symbolic textuality that gives the alienating everyday an aura of selfhood and a promise of pleasure' (Bhaba, 1993:190).

**Memorability**

Teshome speaks of Third Cinema as a guardian of popular memory, the record of visual poetics, folklore and mythology and, above all, the testimony of existence and struggle (1989: 61). Nollywood certainly makes use of this language. Video films do not use imagined sets, but are shot on real locations all over Nigeria. These locations are purposely selected for their capacity to bring back memories and endless connotations. Each location has associated with it a history that viewers
Nollywood films as a site for constructing contemporary African identities

have heard in family stories, and this draws the viewers into the history as actors in the story. There is often an oral narrative and what Ugbojah refers to as the orality of 'folk media' in the African context. It all makes sense because it is grounded in the indigenous culture, produced and consumed by members of the group. These narratives reinforce the values of the group and are the visible cultural features, often quite strictly conventional, by which social relationships and worldviews are maintained and defined.

Igbo films have their own distinguishing characteristics. These for Ekwuazi include 'their themes, their high imaginative intensity and their ability to communicate at a level that immediately holds the emotions springing from a particular Igbo matrix' (2000: 133). These films encode responses to modernity and urbanism that are specifically African, Nigerian, and Igbo. Thus, they are an expression of the Igbo's aggressive commercial mentality, whose field of activity is Nigeria's cities and not merely the Igbo cities. These films, Haynes and Okome argue, are turning attention towards the sources of wealth and change in the country and the processes of change in the villages (2000: 76). Igbo films are mainly in English (more than the Yoruba and the Hausa films) which gives them an edge over other films in markets both within and outside of Nigeria and constitute what audiences outside the country understand as the 'typical' Nollywood films.

Films representing the Westernised lifestyles point to the aspirations of most audiences by projecting on the screen the spectacle of wealth and pageantry with a display of lavish fashions, cars, money, and fabulous houses, but then associate this with cruelty and selfishness. The city is seen as the 'site' where traditional moral values and practices are tested, degraded, compromised and transformed. In other words, these films foreground the cultural tensions that society experiences in the face of culture-contacts. The village settings, on the other hand, are devoid of class consciousness, depicting the image of what Haynes and Okome call a 'usable past' governed by a noble, colourful, and intact tradition (2000: 76). In this, the rural villages are the settings of the narratives which dramatise the dynamics of life in precolonial Africa, taken to be the zone of Africa's communalistic cultural integrity and 'purity' uncontaminated by Western culture.

The portrayal of the vastness of nature

One finds in many Nollywood films what Teshome refers to as a nostalgia for the vastness of nature. Although the action may begin in the urban context and in interior shots where there may be luxury but also a sense of confined closeness, the resolution of the problem is often in shots of going to the village. One will see a car or bus with an open view of hills, deserts and forests in the distance. There is a sense of freedom, beauty and naturalness in this. The preponderance of wide angle shots of longer durations emphasises the relation to nature and the viewer's memories of one's community of origin (Teshome, 1989: 45). Going out into the rural areas, back to the indigenous origins implies a sense of regeneration. The landscape as depicted ceases to be mere land or soil and acquires a phenomenal quality which integrates humans with the general drama of existence itself (Teshome, 1989: 33).
The presentation of persons as part of the natural environment

Nollywood often depicts the human person as at home with his or her environment, rather than trying to develop and transform it. In Nollywood films this has both ecological as well as cosmological significance.

In scenes of rural areas, especially the villages, the people seem to live in a context of natural vegetation. Cultivation is done without much change of the forests or grasslands. Since most Nigerians live in a context of a polluted urban environment which is most uncomfortable, the play of the camera over grass and forests evokes the pleasure of ecological preservation as a remedy to humanity's lost sense of harmony with nature (Berry, 1988: 2).

The use of cosmological symbols brings back the mythologisation of events and the mythifications of human stories that renew both the popular memory and the folkloric thinking of the people's culture. Corroborating this view, Ogundele states that, in Nollywood, 'the world of folktale is a world of fantasy in which animals and inanimate objects take on anthropomorphic attributes, in which human beings acquire nonhuman features and both interact on a more or less equal basis of existence. It is also the world of witches and wizards who may be benevolent or malevolent, depending on circumstances. But above all, it is a morally idealised world in which, eventually, good is rewarded and evil is punished' (Ogundele, 2000: 100).

The connectedness of the inanimate, animate, human and spiritual world

Nigerians, like many other African peoples, traditionally believe that 'man is a product of a universe in which all energy and everything is interconnected, born out of a 'primal force' which has spread a little of itself into all it has generated' (Barlet, 1996: 84-85). For Onwubiko, the world of Africans is one of inanimate, animate, and spiritual beings, and each category of these beings is influencing the universe which they inhabit' (1991: 3). This universe according to Nwoga is a 'space' which is a field of action and not just a location made up of discrete physical distances and separate physical spaces. 'Ala mmuo' (spirit world) and 'ala mmadu' (human world) are the plains of spirit action and of human action, and these need not be physically separated. Thus, it is the non-separation of these entities in physical terms that makes interaction between the various worlds possible so that spirits and their activities impinge on realities that are seen in the human and the physical' (Nwoga, 1984: 36).

This type of world view is often identified as a dimension of African 'communalism'(Moemeka, 1998; Faniran, 2008; Eboh, 2004). It is a term that captures the kind of eco-system operating in Igbo cosmogony and which serves as a pedigree to most Nollywood filmic storylines.

Performance as a form of moral lesson

There is a long tradition of an idealistic, altruistic view in Nigerian popular theatre. As Karin Barber says, in reference to Yoruba popular theatre in the 1970s,
'The people who produced the Yoruba popular theatre did not belong to the social and educational elite...They all shared an aesthetic of intense impact, achieved by incorporating and juxtaposing dense, concentrated chunks or sequences of dramatic action and display. They all purported to edify their audiences through the demonstration of a “moral lesson”...Audiences too...regarded their self-appointed task being to actively extract from the dramas the lessons which they could then apply to their own lives' (2000: 4-5). Although some video film producers would introduce a moral theme 'because that is what the people want,' many Nigerian producers, especially among the Igbos, feel that this is their contribution to a better Nigeria. Few of the producers of Igbo home video today would consider themselves as part of a sophisticated intellectual elite. Nigerian culture has become more cosmopolitan, perhaps a bit more cynical, but most producers would want their videos to be something of a moral lesson.

**Ritual as the site for the reintegration of community and personal identity**

One of the most painful aspects of contemporary Nigerian society is the separation of many people from their communities of origin by reason of their poverty and the need to migrate as lone individuals to the megacities. Many young people run away from their rural communities often out of sheer poverty. They have few aspirations or expectations in life and just survive from day to day.

The portrayal of the unity of the family and the community in video films is like a dream to many viewers. It is an image of family and community where individuals are esteemed and expected to have a future which will bring honor to the family. This is an image of community which Moemeka defines as 'a social structure that is holistically inclusive' (1998: 119). For Eboh, 'it is where the individual and the community are considered as a whole in an unbroken interdependence' (2004: 163).

Video films present an image of communalism which aims at achieving a common ground of everyday life. It is a community in which everyone is concerned for the welfare of everyone else (Okafor, 1984: 287). The Nollywood image of community is a place where all share the same beliefs, ethos, mores and what wealth the people have.

The city, the real world for most Nigerians, is portrayed as a place of isolation, conflict, disregard for rights, vulnerable to betrayal and physical attacks.

Almost invariably video films will present some form of ritual in the course of the narrative and it is the site for reuniting the personages in the film. The rituals often are a visual sign of efforts to maintain cohesion in the values of those involved. The portrayals connect the participant to richer meanings and larger forces of their community. As audiences witness characters going through the well-known action of rituals they have subjective experiences of sharing the same objectivated meaningful world which is attained through the condensed nature of symbols employed. The audience is drawn into a solidarity of the community, past, present and future.

Even though the influence of westernisation is portrayed, yet the old rituals hold a central role, especially in the Igbo films. The traditional Igbo people are presented carrying out rituals through which they communicate with their God or gods,
ancestors and neighbours. Rituals are like a background which is assumed to be continually active. There are at least indirect references to family rituals, kindred rituals, village rituals, community rituals and some other bigger rituals that involve the whole of the people as Igbo indigenes.

The Portrayal of Ritual in Igbo films

*Things Fall Apart*, the film adaptation of Chinua Achebe's 1958 novel

It is not surprising that the integrity of the Igbo past is symbolized by the portrayal of rituals, given the continuing vitality of ritual in contemporary Igbo life. Many of the regions of the Eastern, Igbo part of Nigeria have annual festivals of traditional rituals, dances and forms of indigenous performance. There is a wide interest in these festivals, especially among the young. With this background, Igbo audiences take a particular pleasure in the portrayal of these rituals in film.

*In Things Fall Apart*, a video film that established many of the canons of the Igbo film, the celebration of the ritual of *iri ji* is done with particular significance. *Iriji* is an agricultural festival dedicated to the god of the farm in Igbo land. It is an annual community ritual held at the onset of the harvesting season, mainly in the month of August. No other ritual has quite the depth of meaning as this celebration of harvest in thanksgiving to mother earth for providing rich food. Its other name is the feast of *Ahiajoku* which traditionally denotes its ancientness in the hands of ancestors who worshipped the farm god. 'The purpose is to thank the yam god (*Ajoku*) for the harvest of yam, and it features slaughtering of animals and spilling of their blood in shrines (*Ihu mmuo*) with incantations and prayers to the yam god for a bountiful harvest. Feasting is with cooked yam, chicken, stockfish, *nshiko, ugba*, *usu* and palm wine (Ibeh, 2003: 18).

*Things Fall Apart* brings in the *iri ji* festival to portray the romantic spectacle of Okonkwo and his wives appreciating the land for its gift of a rich harvest and preparing for the ritual celebration of the new yam festival. The ritual follows a week-long term of peace and reconciliation with one's neighbours, formal visits enshrined by custom and tradition in Umuofia. This is considered the most sacred week of the year in the community that celebrates the ritual. In preparation the pathways are weeded for visiting guests by community works. Rich foods are cooked and children are seen sharing stories under the moon light. Ikemefuna, the 'adopted' son of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) leads the whole of Okonkwo's household in story telling during one of the nights of this season. Achebe in his novel argues that 'the feast of the new yam festival was held every year before the harvest began, to honour the earth goddess and the ancestral spirits of the clan. New yams could not be eaten until some had first been offered to these powers. Men and women, young and old, looked forward to the new yam festival because it began the season of plenty in the new year' (1958: 32).

When this video film came out, this scene of the ritual was seen by Igbos all over the world, and invariably it caused deep emotion and a profound sense of recovery of Igbo identity. If perhaps some Igbos had forgotten this ritual and its
significance for the Igbo culture, the video left an indelible mark in the imagination of the contemporary Igbo and many other Nigerians.

A second dramatic ritual in Things Fall Apart is the scene of the funeral of Ogbuefi Ezeudu, a former chief priest of the clan, an elder and a warrior. Generally in Igbo land, the death of titled men and women is seen as a serious passage from the earthly abode to the realm of the ancestors. In order to send them off properly, the living relatives must perform the rituals that enable the deceased to have unobstructed passage and admittance into the circle of ancestors. Even though these rituals may differ in the manner of celebration from one community to another, they are meant to confer the same meaning of effective passage to the underworld where the ancestors continue to live as the 'living dead', overseeing and guiding the activities of their living relatives. In Things Fall Apart the way the funeral rites of Ezeudu are portrayed not only dramatises the Igbo’s belief in and celebration of the rite of passage but becomes a symbol of the loss of the idyllic and proud past of the Igbo.

As soon as the funeral rites have begun, the village masquaraders are seen parading the length and breath of the surrounding villages in the middle of the night to announce Ezeudu’s demise according to Igbo custom. The Igbo viewers would know that this is the ritual way of calling in the spirits to hover round the entire community because a great event has happened. No one is expected to be seen outside, especially women and children. The drums are repeatedly sounded violently and guns are fired in a frenzy. All the titled elders are gathering round the compound of the fallen hero mournfully but bravely. In the traditional way, they are paying their last respects to him and they join the deliberations consulting the oracles to decide on the manner of burial. Then the film has Okonkwo walk his way through the elders to where Ogbuefi Ezeudu lay. There he stood still for a moment like a wandering adventurer, did a symbolic dance to the raving sound of the drums and flutes, shouted the praise-names of the fallen hero, lifted his gun and shot in the air. In the novel and in the film the shot symbolises the end of an era for the Igbo, but, for the Igbo viewers of the video film, the shot is the signal to reinvigorate the history of their people.

Living in Bondage by Kenneth Nnebue

Another presentation of the Iriji festival occurs in Living in Bondage. The scene is the feasting ceremony that brought together all the people of the community in what was to be the conferring of the chieftaincy title on Andy, the protagonist of the film. On the one hand, the film celebrated the great virtue among the Igbo of personal success, what Ekwuazi calls the 'high premium community places on individual's achievement (2000: 134). At a deeper level the sacred rituals of Iriji are the site for purging the people from the curse of greed and selfishness. In his desperate search for wealth, Andy had gone to a cult that demanded that he sacrifice his wife. Andy was torn with his love for his wife, but the desire for money and what money could buy overcame him. Deceptively, he brought his wife for sacrifice. Eventually he becomes a multi-millionaire and at the climax of the film he sought
his great desire, to be honored by his community for his business ability. With all the community already gathered for feasting on the yams and with dances in honor of Andy, there is suddenly the apparition of the deceased wife of Andy. In the midst of the horror-stricken community, the wife came back from the dead and inflicts instant madness on Andy.

The kola nut rituals in Igbo films

The rituals of the offering of the kola nut are central in Igbo culture, and various forms of kola nut rituals are found in all Igbo films. The three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, Hausas in the North, Yorubas in the West and Igbos in the East, have their different species of kola nuts and different forms of rituals. In Igboland visitors are offered the kola nut in a quite formal, ritual way as a symbol of welcome into the family area and as a sign of openness, peace and affection for the visitor. For Igbos the kola nut ceremony is a powerful identity symbol but also the reminder that for Igbos hospitality, generosity and social concern are important values.

The kola nut, oji in the Igbo language, is also shared as a sign of commitment to reconciliation and social solidarity in marriage ceremonies, making political alliances, settlement of court cases, reconciliation of enemies and in religious expiatory sacrifices (Eboh, 2004: 142). The connotations are that Igbos are people who seek peace and reconciliation. In the Mbaise region of Iboland the annual kola nut festival, Oji Ezinihitte, brings the people together, especially the youth, to cooperate in the development of the region.

In the Igbo religious world view the kola nut ritual is also a symbolic action uniting those living, the ancestors and the gods who protect the family and the land. Many Igbo films include some form of kola nut ceremony invoking the gods, the ancestors and the spirits to protect the land and guide all those who live in it. The kola nut libation, dropping on the ground a small piece of the nut, is a symbol of unity with the earth goddess, but is also sign of unity of the people with the earth and the environment.

A typical use of the kola nut ritual and kola nut libations is found in Things Fall Apart. The father of Okonkwo, who represents the whole family, is called upon to offer prayers at the family shrine to thank the ancestors and clan deities for safeguarding the household during the night and invoke their continued blessings as the day progresses. In the wedding ceremony of Obierika's daughter, in Things Fall Apart, the kola nut is offered as a sign of welcome and affection to the wedding guests.

Although the kola nut may be a familiar part of Igbo life, the full meaning of the kola nut rituals is brought out in Igbo video films and emphasises Igbo cultural identity as people of hospitality, generosity, a people who seek unity and reconciliation in the Nigerian context. Also brought out is the contrast with what should be Igbo identity and what it really is in contemporary Nigeria.

Living in Bondage, also uses the kola nut ritual. The sacredness of the ceremony conferring the chieftaincy on Andy is signaled by the kola nut ritual before the meal. In this case the contradiction of using a sacred ritual to confer an honour
based on the evil deed of sacrificing his innocent wife serves to heighten the sacrilegious violation implied by the whole affair. The film itself is a criticism of the contradictions and hypocrisy in the lives of Igbos in their unbridled search for wealth and power in oil-rich Nigeria. The use of sacred rituals for evil means only dramatises the sense that contemporary Igbo culture has gone wrong.

The dancing rituals in Things Fall Apart

Dancing is part of all the rituals in Igbo land as in other parts of Africa and constitutes one of the central communicative aspects of socialising activities in African life. In my own region of Mbaise in Imo State, the festival of Ugwu Mbaise brings together dancing groups and celebrates dancing rituals from all communities of the region as an expression of unity and cultural interaction. Dance has the power of uniting communities in their values and creating a sense of fellowship, shared patriotism and egalitarianism (Uwah, 2005: 85). Bame, in his analysis of dance in Africa, states well the centrality of dance when he says that the African is a 'real man of dance. For him, dance is life itself. It is a way of thinking, living and communicating. Dance forms an integral part of all important facets of life of his life cycle: he dances when a new baby is born and when he conducts puberty rites; he dances during marriage and funeral celebrations, religious ceremonies, festivals, and recreation after a day's work' (1991: 7). In Igbo communities dancing fuses into all celebrations not only rhythmically but also ritually as a part of worship to the dieties during festivals and with joy over successes.

One of the most memorable dance scenes in Igbo films is in Things Fall Apart. Okonkwo celebrates his victory in a wrestling contest against Amalinze the Cat (see note 8) with a triumphant dance. But in many films dances are interspersed: during the circumcision of new-born babies and in other rites of passage, in funerals of titled men and women and the celebrations of the success of families and communities.

Funeral rites in the films The Widow and Last Ofala

Traditional rituals in Nollywood films are not only the site for a call to return to the authentic ethnic values, but may also be the occasion for questioning the values of the past. In the recent much-acclaimed film, The Widow (2007), the portrayal of the dramatic ritual of the funeral of the husband and the torturing disposal of the widow and her property into the hands of the husband's family becomes a comment on the inhuman and unjust treatment of women in Igbo society.

In the background is the tradition that in marriage women are considered the 'properties' that have been purchased with the bridal dowry by the families of their husbands and in the case of the death of the husband are to be 'inherited' (with her property) by the next of kin to the late husband, usually the remaining brother of the husband. If the husband is becoming successful in promoting the wealth and power of the family, the widow is somehow suspected of evil intentions and must be punished and purified. Such is the case in this film directed by Aquila Njamah and Kingsley Ogoro.
In the establishing shot, Nnenna, the widow cries out to the whole community her sufferings as a widow, dressed in rags and tears running down her cheeks, proclaiming 'This is my story'. Step by step she recounts her woes, like a crime journalist reporting the sad story of attacks and wrong doings meted out to an innocent victim. Chima her husband had just returned from abroad and established a pharmaceutical company in Igbo land which was making the family one of the wealthiest in the community. The family is enjoying the good life when, suddenly, tragedy strikes. The husband is eating breakfast and, with a short cough, slumps over the table dead. The patriarchal funeral rites become the vengeance of the family against the widow: making her drink the water used in bathing the deceased husband without consideration of hygiene or safety, sleeping alone in a dark room with the deceased for three days, shaving her head to mourn the dead, and suffering through the funeral orations with thinly veiled curses upon the widow.

In anguish, Nnenna represents all women in Igboland pleading in her weeping, 'Is widowhood not enough punishment for me? Is it our fault that we are born women?'

The suffering of women portrayed in The Widow recalls still other films, Hear My Cry, I and II, in which women are forced to participate in punishing and degrading rituals.

As we noted above, the rituals with their tones of commitment, intense expression of community values and sacredness, become in the drama of these films the occasions for reflecting on personal identities and life values in facing modernity in Nigeria.

Funeral rites in the film, Last Ofala

In Last Ofala, the funeral ritual again becomes the occasion for a dramatic and symbolic scene. The community has lost its king (igwe) and begins now the ritual of choosing and anointing another king (igwe) before the burial of the deceased king.

The typical symbolism that shrouds this rite of passage and coronation of a new king in the film Ofala I & II (2002) is so sacred that it reveals the reverence with which the actions and words of the dying ancestor is held. For instance, the king announces the choice of his son as a successor to the throne with symbolic blessings and coded words thus: 'the lion can never win a wrestling contest with the tortoise. Like the dew that trickles and laughs in the morning, even so is your laughter. You will never go wrong. He who carries a burden in his heart is like a hunch back. The ancestors beckon me on. I have lived a good life. Like the iroko tree, my branches are spread wide. It is time for the lion to go. My son, you carry the seed of the harvest. You carry the water of life. You, it is, that will be the next igwe'.

Conclusions

The question of why the Nollywood films have been so successful in attracting audiences in Nigeria and around the world is best answered by the fact that these films bring together the best elements of one hundred or more years of experience of
viewing and producing performance, especially theatre and film. The productions have formed the tastes and pleasures of the audiences and the audiences have formed the tastes and pleasures of the producers. The experience of production of Nollywood video films is so close to the experience of audience that it is difficult to distinguish them.

Fundamental to the attraction of Nollywood films is the love of performance as a kind of peak life experience where the production is, in some way, part of the life of everybody and the audience participates in the performance as an active community. The Nollywood films also bring in the tradition of performance as a lesson for a good life and the commitment of the people to take to heart the lessons. There is the enjoyment of play with the language and the rhetorical exhibition of the conversational palaver. Also present is the folkloric tradition of theatre which brings good and bad spirits, legendary kings and heroes, incantations and exorcisms into the narrative of everyday life. Very present is the ambivalent projection of ostentatious power, wealth and luxury, by good or bad means, as the aspiration of everybody but at the same time the awareness that this is often a cruel violation of the commitment to share one's wealth with family, community and the poor.

Taken for granted is the religious dimension of the cultural world view, not in the sectarian, institutional sense, but as an attitude of reverence for the unity and life of the universe around one. The Nollywood films use extensively the stock of traditional symbols that film makers know will evoke the nostalgia and the pleasures of being African. Every scene is situated in the circle of the community, that includes the viewers too, with all of the assumed obligations to the community and with the communalistic forms of indigenous communication: dance, singing, dramatic conversation. All of this is performed, I would argue, as part of ritual, the ground of all performance, and it is the process of ritual as withdrawal from everyday of structure and power to enter into a deep communalistic experience in order to return to everyday life with a greater sense of authentic African identity and commitment.

In Nigeria and throughout Africa, going back to the village on occasion is an integral part of life. In Nigeria, the cities are virtually deserted during Christmas holidays or other religio-civic festivals because it is the traditional time to return to the village for the ritual of visiting relatives, especially the elderly, and renewing one's sense of values. The Nollywood films, I would argue, are a way of returning to the village - wherever one may be in the world - to reintegrate one's globalised identity with one's identity of origin.

There is in the experience of the Nollywood films something of what K. Ansu-Kyeremeh defines as a 'centripetal' process of communication which counters the centrifugal process of communication from the Westernised state imposing itself on the interior with a movement of the culture of the village to build African societies and cultures from the roots up.
Notes

1Igbos refers to one of three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. They live in the South East of the country and have a long cultural tradition. Although today the great majority are Christian, the traditional rituals are integrated into their religious world view. About eighteen million Nigerians speak the Igbo language. Like the Yorubas, the Igbos are diversified in their films and the themes are representational of stories that resonate with the people's experiences. The Igbo society is regarded as making a major contribution to the industry of Nollywood films with the screening of the first Nollywood/Igbo film, Living in Bondage (1992) by an Igbo man, Kenneth Nnebue.

2See statistics from the Nigerian Film and Censors’ Board (NFVCB) especially since 2004 to date at www.nfvcb.gov.ng/statistics.php as presented below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Movies</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>233</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>1711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>7630</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3Nollywood is the name given to the Nigerian national cinema which is the film industry being researched in this paper. It is an industry that developed out of a context related to domestic and international cultural, economic, and political influences and produces films today that today is more than three times the annual production of Hollywood's. It is very diverse in the type of film produced, the language used and forms of financing. Nollywood can roughly be divided into Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo video films which designate their production centers in the South-West, North and South-East of Nigeria respectively. (See: Kunzler, 2006).

The name ‘Nollywood’ in actual fact seems to have an uncertain origin, but was derived from acronyms such as ‘Hollywood’ in the same manner as ‘Bollywood’ in India (Cinema of Nigeria: online). The name apparently appeared for the first time in print in an article by Matt Steinglass in the New York Times in 2002, as Jonathan Haynes would suggest. It is a parody of the American Hollywood film industry, but yet does not imply that we have to take the name as signifying Nollywood being in the third place. It points rather to the fact that we live in a multi-polar world where old patterns of cultural imperialism have changed and viewers have a much greater choice of the media to consume.
Like any other national cinema that sustains and challenges the myths of a country's nationhood, the Nollywood film industry functions as an economic weapon in the competitive arena of world capitalism, promoting 'national values. Nollywood uses the language and themes that resonate with Nigerians to tell their stories. But unlike these others where the government sponsors the film industries in their works, Nollywood is left in the private sector and is been sponsored by business merchants rather than the government. (See Cinema of Nigeria at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinema_of_Nigeria).

As a national cinema Nollywood departs significantly from the idea of 'African Cinema' in terms of sponsorships and productions. Even though guided by the ideology of African nationalism, the industry makes films essentially to make money and addresses local concerns. It exists almost entirely outside Pan-African institutions and international circuits that shaped most of the politicised African Cinema (Haynes, 2000: 5); but borrows from state media and the transnational flows of Indian and American films and Nigerian folklores (Dul, J, 2000: 238) to tell Nigerian stories.

In an answer to the question of how Nollywood reflect the 'lived-in' situations of Nigerians, Juliet, 24, a final year student of Imo State University replied 'there is a film Stubborn Grasshopper...if you watch that film you will see that it is what happened here in Nigeria many years ago. In fact it captures what happened to one of the former military presidents of the country, Abacha. No wonder after a while he died they acted that film...whereby the military president was ruling badly and they have to target him with two ladies...in fact if you are watching that film and you know the situation of things in the country then...while the film is going on you will remember Abacha. So I think they are really trying!'.

The Indigenisation Act is a decree of the Nigerian military government in 1972 that demanded all cinema halls, formerly owned by foreigners to be handed over to indigenes to operate. It also challenged media houses to focus on indigenous products and was aimed mainly as an avenue of promoting the people's own arts and cultures, as against the dominance of foreign films and other media products all over the country at the time (See: Aderinokun, 2005).

Bob Manuel Udokwu describes himself thus: 'My name is Bob-Manuel Udokwu. I was born in Enugu, the capital of Enugu State. But I am from Ogidi in Anambra state. My studies were at the University of Port Harcourt where I have a certificate and a first degree in Theatre Arts. Then I went to University of Lagos to get a Masters degree in Political Science specializing in International Relations. I have won so many awards including the Afro Nollywood Awards in Oct 2006. I also write scripts, act and direct films'. I interviewed him in the course of his visit to Dublin to the Dublin African Film Festival 21/4/2007.

RMD otherwise called Richard Mofe Damijo also visited Dublin in the course of Dublin African Festival in 2007 when I also interviewed him on Nollywood. He also describes himself as a Nollywood actor and a lawyer thus 'I am a graduate of the university of Benin. I am a lawyer. I am an actor and a business man also' (21/4/07).

Amalinze the Cat is the nick name given to the wrestler from Umuofia's neighbouring village who engaged Okonkwo in the inter-village wrestling contest. His name evokes the sentiment of a warrior who is never defeated hence he is called 'the cat'. Chinua Achebe describes him thus in his
novel, 'Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten from Umuofia to Mbaino. He was called the cat because his back would never touch the earth. It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight which the old men agreed was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights' (See Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 1958).

*Igwe* is the title given to kings and traditional rulers in the Anambra/Enugu areas of the Igbo speaking area of Nigeria. It's substitute is the title *Eze* used especially in the Imo and Abia States part of Igbo land in the South Eastern geopolitical province of the country.

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**Personal interviews**

I.Ebere Uwah with Bob Manuel Udukwu, 21/04/07.

I.Ebere Uwah with Richard Mofe Damijo, 21/04/07.
Does national development policy encourage participatory communication?  
The case of Tanzania

Benedict Mongula*

Abstract

Virtually all political leaders in Africa, at the time of independence, announced a policy of encouraging grassroots participation in the national decisions. The Arusha Declaration of Tanzania was one of the clearest and strongest statements guaranteeing popular participation. The present article takes Tanzania as a case study to analyse why, in spite of all the talk of grassroots participation, it is so difficult to promote significant participatory communications in Africa. This article examines the cases of systematic repression by government of movements attempting to institutionalise participation. Also examined is why there are so few serious, long-term and sustained attempts in Tanzania to introduce systems of grassroots, participatory communication.

Introduction

People's participation in political, economic and social spheres of life is widely acknowledged to be important for development, and attempts to implement various forms of grassroots participation are evident in various African countries. In Tanzania in particular the Arusha Declaration of 'Ujamaa' and self-reliance of 1967, soon after independence, is the major policy statement of participation. This became the basis for numerous statements and circulars promoting participation and the interests of industrial workers and farmers. In the last decade and a half, spurred especially by policies of Structural Adjustment Programme pushing democratisation, there has been a dramatic increase in policies of participation. This has set in motion multi-party politics, the rise in the number of private media and the mushrooming of civil society organisations. In the economic sphere there has also been a rise in the number of small and micro businesses which has increased participation in the economic sector. Recently, as a way to mobilise local development initiatives, the government of Tanzania has tried to institutionalise local participatory planning at the village level by drawing lessons from experiments with

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participatory rural appraisal in various development agencies (Mongula, 2006). Related moves to increase participation are evident in Uganda and other East African countries, albeit at varying levels of intensity.

These attempts at democratisation have had very mixed success. In the political sector, although various African countries have adopted multi-party democracy, the rigging of elections and control of parliaments by the ruling parties are commonplace. This, in fact, is stifling participatory democracy. Only a few of the thousands of NGOs established in recent years can be described as genuinely committed to their mission of promoting participation of the communities they serve. As Mustafa has shown in the case of Tanzania, the majority of these are actually 'briefcase NGOs', undemocratic in nature and opportunistic self-seekers hedging on donors' money (2006). Press freedom, which is considered one of the pillars of greater participation, is limited by political and business heavyweights leading to biased reporting (Mosha, 2004). This is undermining the chances for increased participatory democracy and greater economic participation. Economically, there has been a rapid growth of unemployed and underemployment in the informal sector of the urban population and very little increase in agricultural productivity in the rural areas. Attempts of industrial workers and small farmers to organise themselves to get better support have been controlled or repressed. Even with the acclaimed record levels of economic growth in Africa the gap between the rich and the poor is growing more rapidly because governments repress or buy off people's organisations (Tabb, 2002). What Africa is actually witnessing is growing control of the economic sector by major transnational companies and a few enormously wealthy indigenous entrepreneurs, with small and medium entrepreneurs holding a dwindling share of national economies.

One of the major resources for participation is information, including information regarding resources, policies and programmes, economic opportunities, rights and laws, and the environment. Information is power and this applies to a wide variety of situations. For example, policy makers need accurate information to formulate policies to maximise citizens participation in the economy so that the field is not left to foreign companies. The rural or urban poor, fighting for greater access to services and economic benefits, need more information on how to get access to resources. Women, youth and elderly persons seeking greater access to services and economic benefits, need more information on how to get access to resources. The rural or urban poor, fighting for greater access to services and economic benefits, need more information on how to get access to resources. Women, youth and elderly persons seeking greater access to services and economic benefits, need more information on how to get access to resources.

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This paper explores the significance of participation and participatory action, but with a special focus on why, in Tanzania, with all of its excellent policy statements, there is in fact precious little effective participation in decision making in any sector. While appreciating such factors as colonial and neo-colonial legacies, power structures and vested interests, and limited capacities of governments and local governments, this article focuses primarily on the lack of access to information, education and communication as barriers to participation. A basic thesis of this paper is that participation is not just a matter of particular projects, but must be a national socio-political culture, a set of perspectives and values that penetrates every institution. Such a culture of participation depends much on the vision of nation set out at the beginning of independence but also on the slow trial and error method in national history. Building institutions of access to information, education and communication is a matter of the development of the national self-consciousness.

This article paper builds on the extensive research done on the issue of participation in Tanzania, especially by my colleagues at the Institutes of Development Studies at the University of Dar es Salaam, and tries to provide a synthesis of our present knowledge of the problem.

Participation in Tanzania in historical perspective

The emphasis on a participatory model of development in many African countries dates back to the first decade of independence. In Tanzania the Arusha Declaration of Ujamaa and Self-Reliance in 1967 was the reference point for many planning documents calling for participation in the development process. The Tanzanian government's 'Education for Self-Reliance' policy (ESR) of 1978, its Presidential Circular No. 1 of 1970 on 'Workers Participation', the ruling party's 1971 TANU Guidelines or “Mwongozo wa Tanu” were built on the Arusha Declaration. The ESR sought to promote education for self-reliant participation of school leavers in economic life while the other two policies emphasized the role of participation at the workplace or in local communities. The recent article of Adkins and Wembah (2005) affirms this: 'since independence Tanzania recognized the imperative of involving the people from community to national level in the determination of issues affecting them'. These early major policy efforts have created a set of national goals that the country is continually trying to live up to. In this sense, Tanzania's history has been a great asset.

Firstly, the establishment of the country with an unusually idealistic philosophy of participatory development has been a continual point of reference. When the hurried and ill-advised responses of the government and TANU to development problems brought extremely undemocratic and non-participatory moves such as the nationalisation of peoples houses, systematic killing of free enterprise, forced resettlement of rural populations in Ujamaa Villages and state muzzling of the press and co-operative unions, this was widely criticised. Overzealous and power hungry politicians and bureaucrats failed to interpret properly Nyerere's philosophy of Ujamaa and were left to do things in a way that wrecked the economy and brought suffering and misery to many people. By abolishing free enterprise and spreading

Does national development policy encourage participatory communication

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propaganda that entrepreneurs were 'enemies of the peoples', the spirit of enterprise was crushed. It was not until economic reforms and programmes of the 1990s that private participation in economic activities resumed. These early failures of TANU and the government have left in the national consciousness a certain sense of shame and the conviction that finding ways to make government accountable to the people is a priority.

Secondly, political parties and political leaders recognize that they still have not created a culture of using political power responsibly and of allowing a truly open public debate. Politically, under the framework of a single political party, individuals' views or the views of groups such as youth, women, farmers, and workers were filtered by party organs to the advantage of political cronies. This deterred any opposition party decisions, reinforced government mistakes and left Nyerere to go unopposed, continually winning a 99 per cent approval rating during elections. Even today, although there has been some improvement in participatory democracy and the ensuing multi-party democracy and freedom of the press, this has not been without much resistance from the ruling party that is unwilling to implement to the full the Nyalali Commission and to make necessary constitutional changes. Nevertheless, there is today in Tanzania a much better understanding that allowing open debate, criticism of public decisions and complete accountability are for the best interests of all.

Thirdly, one of the great early successes of Nyerere's Ujamaa was the wide access to social services of education and health. Tanzania introduced universal primary education in 1974 to ensure that every child received primary education, and this has been repeated by the Primary Education Development Plan to implement the global Education for All policy (Omari, et al 1983). In the 1970s Tanzania gained a reputation in Africa of a very high rate of literacy and high primary school enrolment. Although the economic crisis of the 1980s made it difficult to maintain these levels, the commitment to provide universal primary and secondary school remains very important in the national consciousness. This sense of commitment is behind current efforts to rapidly increase the number of secondary schools and train thousands of teachers in a crash programme.

Finally, the philosophy of participatory self-reliance, which was so strongly emphasised in the first two decades of independence, also remains strong in the national political and economic culture. In the last twenty years there have been improvements in participation in some areas following the rise of multiparty democracy, increased freedom of expression in the press, increased tendency to good governance and liberalisation of economic activities. But, as will be shown in greater detail, Tanzanians recognise that the country is far from realising the goal of participatory self-reliance. It is a country still at the threshold of participatory democracy, and the majority of the people are living in poverty without access to social services and unable to afford a decent life. Far from achieving self-reliant independence, national resources are far too controlled by foreign exploitation.

A national culture which recognizes participation as a right In Tanzania, as in many African countries, it is increasingly recognised that participation is a constitutional right of every citizen. Every person has the right to participate in
decision making and activities of his/her nation in various spheres such as economic, social and political activities. The many failed experiments of the state in Tanzania to unilaterally embark on development projects, has made it clear that participation is one of the cornerstones of development. It is commonly realized today that apart from enhancing the people's democratic right to take part in decision making, participation helps to promote knowledge and information sharing between communities and development agencies. Participation also builds confidence and trust which are important for local people's acceptance of ideas and values underlying development projects. It leads to capacity building and empowerment and raises the interest of communities to self-explore local problems and their solutions as well as enhancing local self-organising capacity (Mongula 2005). It is not only widely realised that community involvement is important but local people should be left to plan and manage local activities because their ideas are practical, economic and sustainable. (Jolly, 2001).

There has been a slowly growing awareness of other benefits of participation such as helping to confer local or community ownership and control of resources and projects, helping in local resources mobilisation, helping to increase the people's capacity to analyse and interpret things relating to their lives and making possible the integration of disadvantaged groups without a voice in development plans (Mongula, 2005). Mihanjo adds that 'participation enhances freedom', and this includes freedom to challenge authority, to demand accountability in the use of public resources, and to challenge policies. He observes the lack of participation in policies by pointing out that 'little room has been given to grassroots people to translate liberal economic policies into practice', (and that) liberalisation was merely carried out by opening the market, which did not benefit peasants. (Mihanjo, 2005:44).

There is also an increasing awareness of the importance of political participation including people's rights to free participation in political processes such as voting and standing for election, freedom of dissent or to hold own views, and freedom to assemble or discuss matters of national interest such as corruption and its detrimental effects. These rights and freedoms are important for the promotion of political democracy (South Commission, 1990). This kind of participation amongst other things is capable of stimulating local initiatives, effective exploitation of available opportunities and increased access to health and education services (Islam, 1993) as well as community-based and community-led actions (Mbilinyi, 2005).

Economic participation has also been highlighted by Islam. This includes 'participation in markets, involving enterprise, initiative and innovations' and equal access to resources such as land and access to credit facilities and fiscal incentives (Islam, 1993). The dangers of globalisation that concentrate ownership and control of the economies of African countries in foreign hands and with a few powerful local businessmen and bureaucratic elite at the expense of the majority of the population underscores the importance of economic participation. This has caused a widespread 'mass pauperisation'. The concerns of participation therefore transcend the sphere of political decision making to include participation in the economy, of citizens versus foreigners and of the majority versus a minority of the population.
Participatory action is also linked to research methodologies that enable local communities being investigated to participate actively rather than regarding them as mere sources of data. It is capable of disaggregating communities into various social categories and engaging them in discussion and critical analysis; this way the methodology is not only powerful in addressing marginalised social groups but is also empowering, capacity building and transformative (Mbilinyi, 2005). However, there are questions on the efficacy of participatory research and in particular whether sufficient capacity exists for it so as to realize its benefits. (Rogge, 2005).

The institutionalisation of participation in Tanzania

Today in Tanzania and in various other East African countries such as Uganda, participatory action is increasingly becoming embedded in public decision making processes (Vainio-Mattila, 2005). In Tanzania the Local Government Reform (LGR), the Public Service Reform Programme and the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty (NSGRP) are emphatic in basing good governance on participatory decision making procedures for public policies, plans and other decisions. At the national, district and village levels various participatory forums have been instituted such as stakeholders meetings, parliament and parliamentary committees, District Council and Council Committees, village government hearings and village assemblies. Drawing lessons from participatory process experiments such as the Finnish-supported Regional Integrated Project Support (RIPS) in Mtwara and Lindi regions, the Swedish-supported Rural Health through Sanitation and Water project (HESAWA) and UNICEF programmes that entailed extensive participatory action, recently the government has introduced a village-based participatory planning approach titled ‘Opportunities and Obstacles’ to enable local people to discover the opportunities and obstacles to development around them and to draw corresponding action plans. (Mongula, 2006).

The Nyalali Commission and the laws relating to political parties, elections and electoral commission have institutionalised multiparty democracy and expanded the freedom and opportunity of individuals to participate in the political process in Tanzania. This has resulted in the creation of more than ten political parties in the country amongst which the Civil United Front (CUF) has emerged as a strong contender to the ruling CCM Party in Zanzibar. On the mainland, Chama cha Demokrasia Makini (CHADEMA), Tanzania Labour Party (TLP) and CUF and UDP have won sufficient seats in parliament to force the ruling party to increasing accountability. In addition there have been specific policies and legislative actions promoting greater participation including the participation of women in politics, the rise of politically-oriented NGOs and increased press freedom. The development of a competent and independent investigative press has been a very important factor in bringing political leaders to accountability to the people. The evolution of institutions of political participation in Tanzania has been slow, but there has been steady progress.

The economic reforms of the 1980s driven by the Structural Adjustment
Programme (SAP), especially the investment, trade and financial reforms, have relaxed the controls that had been placed on the economy for more than twenty years and created an opportunity for private participation. In addition a variety of policy instruments have been adopted to encourage entrepreneurial investment such as the Tanzania Investment Policy, Small and Medium Enterprises policy, business financing policy, Business Environment Strengthening Programme, Tanzania Investment Centre, Tanzania National Business Council, and Tanzania Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Agriculture. Targeting specifically the high percentage of people living below the poverty line, a programme on Property and Business Formalisation (MKURABITA) was established along the ideas of Hernando de Soto (1989) of Peru to help informal business become formal and gain access to financial institutions and the support of the judicial system.

On the continued advice of the World Bank, political leaders were brought to understand the limitation of government resources to finance health and education. A broad ‘cost-sharing policy’ was adopted in Tanzania, and the private sector and religious institutions were encouraged to participate effectively in social service provision. For example, the religious institutions were given incentives to open universities. But, the government continues to play the leading role in this sector based, in part, on its own resources but also on increased donor commitment inspired by the UN Millennium Goals, the global declaration of Education for All (EFA) at Jomtien, and the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative on debt relief by donors. The Poverty Reduction Strategies of the year 2000 and 2005 in Tanzania have made social service provision a major strategy and provided a framework of actions not only of government departments but also donors and NGOs. These apparently were translated into concrete terms by subsequent initiatives such as the Education Sector Development Programme, Primary Education Development Plan, Secondary Education Development Plan, the Health Sector Reform, and the Health Sector-wide Approach Programme (SWAP).

All this points to the significant progress in setting up the institutional structures which could be the basis for widespread participation of the public in the political, economic and socio-cultural development of the country. How effective this institutional structure is still remains to be seen.

The actual situation of participation

What seems to be lacking in Tanzania, as in so many other African countries, are forms of public pressure to push the institutional machinery into action. Widespread participation is, overall, a distant dream. Numerous civil society organisations that foster participation have mushroomed in Tanzania, and there is now in the country considerable diversity in the print and electronic media. The increasing variety of information processes are providing a fertile ground for publicising participatory action. Major policies, strategies or plans such as the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty were subjected to intensive stakeholders discussions at the level of district government. Civil society groups made their voice felt at the national level where various Government ministries and
social and economic interests invited open discussion. Budget tracking by civil society organisations to monitor the flow and use of budget funds is an increasing phenomenon and, contrary to common expectation, the practice is accepted by the government. As pointed out numerous political parties have been formed, multiparty elections are being conducted, the local entrepreneurs and particularly the informal economic sector have expanded.

The level of participation raises questions. When it comes to planning and policy, the lack of practical outcomes confirms that much of this is what Uphoff calls 'pseudo participation' (Oakley, 1999). There are many meetings and a great many words poured out, but the influence on public decisions is relatively slight. To quote Oakley, 'participation is stronger in rhetoric than in practical reality' (1999:15). The concentration of power is so great that political or economic leaders can simply ignore the demands and protests of the public. The limited progress is particularly noticed in the political area in terms of the poor quality of participation in elections and participation of marginalised groups. The freedom to assemble and discuss issues of national concern, including corruption, is not used by many publics. There is widespread evidence of the lack of effectiveness of public participation: commonplace are the excessive corruption in elections, intimidation of critics or dissenting voices in the press, abuse of state power to support the ruling party, and political cronyism. Power holders do not feel the influence of public opinion. On the economic front under-resourced and managerially deficient domestic investors and companies are unable to compete with technologically advanced foreign investors. Local manufacturers cannot compete with imports from Southeast Asia. The inability of micro enterprises in the informal economy to grow is perpetuating poverty. The low incomes of farmers and workers and the continuing high rate of unemployed and underemployed people, especially among the youth, belies any talk about empowerment of people through participation. Faced by low agricultural technologies, unfavourable markets and prices and weather conditions, farmers' incomes are unlikely to improve.

Although participation in education via increased enrolments is now almost 100 per cent for primary school and over 80 per cent of the grade sevens who pass their examinations, this access to education is not very effective because of the lack of teachers, poor school management, unhealthy school environments, and lack of textbooks. The same sort of limitations are evident in health facilities and virtually all other services. The question is why have those attempts at participation not yielded expected results?

Globalisation and participation

It is widely acknowledged that global economic and power relations shape what is taking place in the developing countries, and the restricted participation in Tanzania on many fronts is a clear manifestation of that. Although the importance of the USA may be reduced compared to its position thirty years ago, the USA still dominates the international economy. The role of the 'Washington Consensus', namely, the coalition of the Breton Woods institutions, the Wall Street financial
markets and the US Treasury interests in support of the global capitalist system is clear. The globalisation process links together the large economies and renders unequal the partnership between the centres of capitalism and the peripheries. (Tabb, 2002). Regarding the international influence on national politics, Mbilinyi observes that 'external donors have much more power today than ever before, not only in broad policy formulation but in strategic planning and implementation' (2005). My own research has confirmed the increasingly 'dependent character of planning in Tanzania' (Mongula, 2006). Externally driven frameworks of plans and policies such as Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), Medium Term (Plan and) Expenditure Framework (MTEF), and Sector-wide Approach programme (SWAP) have not only proved to be of limited value and benefit to the majority of Tanzania, but have benefited foreign and local consultants, NGOs and a few other elites with little value added over past practices.

Economic participation by domestic investors and entrepreneurs has been undermined by large foreign investors and free entry of imports from low-income Southeast Asian countries. The chances for local industrialisation are limited by cheap and sometimes counterfeit products from China and elsewhere that often go untaxed due to corruption (Mongula, 2008). Under external pressure to implement neo-liberal market policies in order to qualify for aid, the government is not only unable to provide the protection of its own small industries that is necessary for industrialisation and prosperity of local entrepreneurs but has made concessions to various other unfavourable policies and decisions. The most notorious include selling off of the domestic banks to foreign interests (for example, National Bank of Commerce), exploitative contracts between Tanzanian public power utilities (TANESCO) and equipment providers, and mining contracts with foreign companies which milk the country of its meager resources and bring virtually no resources to the national treasury.

Given the low degree of participation of small entrepreneurs in the domestic economy, the increased integration of Tanzania in the global economy is benefiting an entrepreneurial and government bureaucratic elite and is increasing the gap between the rich and poor in the country. Public officials and local investors who have close political connections with public officials have privileged access to foreign capital that often includes bribery and graft. The public seems to have no influence or power to stop these notoriously illegal and unjust activities. In utter disregard of public trust, senior government officials and leading politicians have been able to buy state-owned enterprises, acquire shares in foreign-controlled privatised firms or buy residences at give-away prices. Government officials and their business friends are allowed to make contracts for the development of public services, improvement of transport and communication at exorbitant costs. Not only is this burdening the people with high electricity and fuel rates, but because of the nature of the contracts, it is causing environmental damage and is displacing poor people from their traditional lands and homes. In spite of large foreign investments, the transportation and communication system continues to remain extremely inadequate. What is dismaying is that the public seems to have no way of prosecuting these notoriously illegal actions or stopping future similar ventures.
Thus, all the institutional machinery for participation discussed above seems to have little influence on this abuse of power.

Various initiatives are being pursued to promote participation of poor people economically, such as promoting small and medium enterprises (SMEs) through Presidential Funds at the personal disposition of the president, Jakaya Kikwete, and the ruling party (‘JK billions’) and through various micro-financing initiatives. All this, including the promotion of export of products of small entrepreneurs and lowering the minimum wage scale, are of relatively little value for economic development, poverty reduction and citizens' participation. These measures almost always depend on donor funds and other forms of foreign aid so that these are not products of the economic system of Tanzania. This only exposes the country to the usual draconian conditions of this kind of foreign investment: minimal taxes, low wages, restricted labour organisations, no investment in local infrastructure, no concern for environmental destruction and no long-term concern for the local communities where these investments are located. Dependence on this kind of foreign investment avoids the long-term restructuring of the economy to favor small farmers and small entrepreneurs.

Resistance of governing elites to participation at the national, regional and local levels

Since the colonial period the ministries and their bureaucracies have regarded themselves as possessing all the answers to development and they have been accustomed to handing down solutions without responding to local knowledge and efforts. NGOs are thought to be free of direct political influence and to be more oriented toward service of the people. In theory many NGOs question the implicit control strategy of government development efforts. But in practice the NGOs have continued the old colonial-modernisation strategy (Mongula, 2005). There is a move in Tanzania as in other parts of Africa toward decentralisation and devolution of power within the framework of Local Government Reform. All of these efforts, however, are resting on an inherited administrative and power structure that goes back to its colonial roots.

A decentralised people-centred participatory approach to decisions poses a challenge to authorities, and it is resisted or circumvented by governing elites because it means a loss of power and multiple forms of illegal profit. Part of the problem lies in the lack of legal mechanisms which would make the governing elites accountable to the people. A dominant political party which has been in power for nearly fifty years since independence rules in a manner not much different from the colonial occupiers of the country. Having controlled the press and bribed their way past dissenting voices, they are using public institutions to pursue personal business interests, forge advantageous partnerships with foreign companies, and transfer money abroad to foreign banks, supposedly away from investigative bodies. Business interests have built political alliances to gain illegal advantage for investments. All of this activity feels threatened by open, public investigation and
Does national development policy encourage participatory communication

debate. Open repression of the flow of information and popular political participation would attract the attention of the donor agencies, but it is possible to find subtle and effective ways of diverting public participation or demands for accountability and neutralising opposition (including opposition within the ruling party). At the regional, district and local levels alike there is resistance toward public participation as this is likely to expose various evils including inefficiencies, misuse of resources and corruption.

The existing administrative structures are such that they allow little space for voices from the grassroots to be heard. When movements try to protest unjust state actions their representatives are told to follow the 'right channels' to solve their problems even though these are in effect non-existent. Political leadership often manages to pit popular movements against each other with the proposal that existing state structures represent a 'peaceful compromise'. With the ruling party controlling virtually all of the resources and agencies of the nation, popular voices risk simply being crushed. In Tanzania there are very few alternative sources of information or open forums for public debate. Lacking in courage and overburdened by administrative and legal structures, and especially lacking the necessary information and solidarity, grassroots movements have no option but to resign themselves to pressures from above. Many of the civil society organisations in Tanzania such as TAMWA (Tanzania Media Women Association), HakiKazi (an organisation promoting the right to work), HakiElimu (promoting the right to education), and the Tanzania Gender Network Programme have shown great capacity to mobilise popular support, but find great resistance among government elites to any significant changes.

It is a well-known fact that people at the grassroots have practical knowledge that is based on their life experiences, and that they can make decisions fully conscious of the benefits and risks involved. They do not embark on untried experiments, as governments often do, because they know that these are costly and they themselves must bear the costs. Government action continues the old colonial, modernisation mentality of top-down pressure with no attempt to listen to the actors involved and no attempt to open a discussion leading toward consensus. An example is the recent 'cashew nut saga' of 'Stakabadhi ghalani (or receipts in the warehouse) in the southeastern, Lindi region of Tanzania. The local people opposed the new arrangement of cashew nut marketing which was based on the Warehouse Receipts Act 2005, Act no.10 of 2005 and Warehouse Regulations 2006, preferring immediate payments. Cashew nut farmers feared the new arrangement. A participatory action sought to first have a programme to educate local people fully on the benefits of the new system being introduced and to provide possibilities to organize and negotiate prices and other details. This was not done. In other words the new system failed to appreciate the need to respect local interests, local knowledge, local values, local information and local networks and, instead, tried to bulldoze the people into accepting it. Not surprisingly, the whole scheme proved impossible to implement successfully. Once again, the colonialist, modernisation, centralised planning model of development has proved futile.
Lack of expertise for participatory research

Participatory action research is today fully accepted as a research methodology in social science research at many universities in Africa. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and, as a means for rural transformation, Participatory Action Research (PAR) are also widely accepted by various development agencies. In both cases, however, there have been bureaucratic barriers towards full realisation of the benefits of these methodologies. Attempts to adapt and improve them in the Tanzanian context have not been very successful.

Part of the problem is that Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is marked by serious methodological flaws when being applied (Rogge, 2005). Both the dogmatic application of the PRA tool kit and use of PRA as an end in itself have contributed to its failure to realise the intended transformative results. Furthermore, institutions and project officers have not approached the methodology with the professionalism and seriousness required. At times, users of PRA have been found to contradict the very principles of PRA in their own decisions and actions as they engage with communities. There are numerous examples of an invitation to beneficiaries to help design and set up a new programme, but then to suddenly terminate it without consulting the people at all (Mongula, 2005).

As pointed out by Mihanjo (2005), participatory action that does not boil down ultimately to a rise in people’s freedoms and living conditions is questionable. He notes that, in spite of encouragement of participatory action in Tanzania, the growth of peasants’ incomes and rural economic growth in general have remained elusive and the root causes of poverty are not being dealt with. In urban centres the informal sector has burgeoned but consists largely of minor services that enable the working poor to barely survive. In many parts of Tanzania programmes which have emphasised participation in analysis and planning are being replaced by a new programme approach that is bent more on enterprise growth rather than on participatory action as such.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing the various forms of participatory action research is to integrate the principle and methodology into mainstream development theory. Hence the need to revisit participatory action theory to discover how to approach it in a way that enables local communities to realise greater freedom, capacity and power to decide on correct policies and plans that bring about gainful employment, economic growth, and social equity. This means going to the very reasons for introducing participatory action, namely, to enable the people to take initiatives to increase productivity, better livelihoods and economic growth. Conventional methods of planning and research not only have failed to produce economic growth, but have consumed enormous resources without delivering intended results. Programmes have left the people passive and have not responded to grassroots initiatives with the resources needed to bring these initiatives to their goals.
The problem of education and information

The lack of knowledge and the lack of education that provides access to knowledge are almost everywhere the greatest limitation to participation. With only minimal education and information people at the grassroots are at a disadvantage compared with those from development agencies in effective participation in stakeholders planning meetings. They cannot defend their rights, nor demand the services and accountability of public officials. (Oxfam/Eade, 1997. Access to communication channels and greater information is essential for building organisational capacity and in developing personal, social and political empowerment of people at the grassroots. Education and information are required to deal with formidable socio-cultural barriers that inhibit participation such as the fear of witchcraft, timidity and exaggerated respect in the face of traditional authority, and fear of the reprisals of the powerful.

The lack of information is a problem in almost every kind of participatory action. When investors enter local communities, the people are unable to defend themselves. State and foreign companies insist on secrecy, protecting signed contracts from public knowledge. The public obviously has no way of knowing of the amassed wealth of public officials using public office. At local levels, in an effort to minimise accountability, government officials do not provide information of local budgets or other resources.

An example of this problem is found in a project of Mbilinyi. In their attempt to bring greater participation, Mbilinyi and her colleagues embarked on a special campaign in Tanzania to educate and inform communities about how to respond to crises of food security: how to search out food sources, where to look for alternative supplies and knowledge of government policies in times of food scarcity. Eventually the informational campaign was banned by the state because it began to reveal the underhanded actions of authorities (Mbilinyi, 2005).

Information and communication as a cornerstone of participation

Participatory action begins with initiatives by people who will no longer wait for the state or other agency to solve local problems and who decide to find ways collectively to solve the problems through their own organised efforts. A first step is the more precise definition of the problem and the causes of the problem. Already at this point, access to information and communication channels is important because the causes of the problem may be outside the immediate experience of the people at the grassroots. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is often proposed as an information-gathering method at this stage of participatory action. Experience shows, however, that PRA does not provide the analytic skills to follow the lines of causality in the structure of local power and to discover whether services are being channelled toward higher-status people in the community. PRA does not reveal the causes of exploitative marketing or labour relations (Mongula, 2004; Rogge, 2005). It is too much focused on transect walks, drawing of village maps, locating resources in the village, charting institutions on village maps, and other mechanical kinds of
reasoning. The PRA is unable to provide basic information on places outside the community where community leaders can obtain the necessary resources and other relevant information. When people discover that they are systematically being discriminated against, PRA does not provide information on who might be the relevant allies to help them defend their rights. The PRA method stops short of providing sources of information and training on how to strengthen capacities of local organisational action, administration of decisions and getting better political representation. People's action needs to be informed about how to use the expertise of professionals so that these provide suggestions and not solutions, leaving the communities complete freedom and power to decide what to do (Mbaga, 2006)

Effective and sustainable participation comes about when the community pro-actively begins to discuss its socio-economic situation and demands answers from authorities in order to explore ways forward. Mbilinyi, speaking of ‘emancipatory participatory development’, refers to community-based and community-led actions such as 'participatory budgeting in Brazilian cities and participatory planning in Kerala, India' (2005). This, however, requires that the people be armed with information on existing policies and programmes, on their rights and powers to decide on matters relating to their lives and to demand accountability in the use of public or common resources. In such situations the people are transformed from cynical observers of government institutions into active participants, attending meetings, taking part in discussions, knowing that this is the way to improve the quality of decisions affecting their lives and to put an end to misallocation or misuse of public funds and abuse of human rights.

Sources and channels of information

At this point it may be helpful to indicate the typical channels of information and communication that are particularly useful for participatory action. These sources are primarily 'communication' in that every actor in the process is a source of information and local knowledge is the major source of information. All of the actors together are interacting and, with the input of local knowledge, creating a pool of information which cannot be said to be the product of any one actor. When a given population has never experienced participatory communication and action, it is often necessary to open a space of freedom for the poor and marginal to learn to voice their feelings, express their views, learn to discuss common problems, engage in participatory dialogue and have the experience of planning forms of participatory action. The term ‘participatory development communication’ has been used by Bessette (2004) to refer to communication where there is dialogue between various stakeholders related to a particular problem.

At the most general level, the mass media are useful for alerting the public regarding current affairs: major decisions and policies of the government, major social and economic problems, new trends in the development of the country, the proposals of popular movements, demands for accountability in public services and
other items of major interest for the active citizen. The mass media are also 'communication' in that they are the point of intersection of those providing information and those seeking information. The problem with much of the mass media in Africa and especially in countries with a less developed and less specialised mass media such as Tanzania, the media serve mainly the needs and interests of the elite. It is said that in Tanzania with a population of approximately forty million and a potential reading public of some twenty million the daily newspapers in all languages reach at best an elite of 200,000. The state radio is informative, but controlled directly from the president's office. Commercial radio is not particularly informative. In Africa only a few educational and community radio stations are there to create information for participatory action. Relatively few countries such as Ghana, Zambia, South Africa and Tanzania have legislation promoting educational and community radio, and some countries such as Nigeria resist the introduction of effective community radio.

The mass media (rather than local/community media) have been widely used in Tanzania by HakiElimu (an organisation promoting the right to education) through special TV advertisements and policy debate programmes. There is need, however, for collaboration and networking between local and regional, national and international sources. Especially important is the participation of all stakeholders, above all the people at the grassroots, for effective dialogue and an information input in political, social, economic and legal aspects. The communication in the villages should be interactive, with all ages, genders and occupations participating and making their input. It is important that the views of the villages be articulated up to the district and regional level. Above all the communication process between the district and villages should be interactive rather than being top-down in nature. Thus, if the mass media is used, the mass-media content must reflect the input from the villages.

A second level are organisations that are involved in sensitising the public regarding particular problems such as human rights. These organisations, frequently an NGO, may use various media to alert a specific public such as women of their rights. In Tanzania particularly noteworthy are HakiKazi (an NGO engaged in campaigns in favour of the right to work), HakiElimu (campaigning on education rights), RIPS, (providing support to the Regional Integrated Programme in Southern Tanzania) SNV (An NGO supported by Netherlands helping in building rural capacity), Action Aid/Aide et Action (An NGO engaged in rural transformation), World Vision, (an NGO supported by faith-based organizations engaged in rural development), Caritas (supported by the Catholic Church for humanitarian relief and development), and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Dar es Salaam to name but a few. They have used the mass media, both the print and electronic media, and have gone directly to local communities or work through other organisations to sponsor public campaigns to educate/sensitise the people at the grassroots regarding human rights or to build local organisational capacity. They have developed well-designed information kits, using Kiswahili, regarding current government policies and programmes. They have also provided information on the functioning of local government, including village assemblies, functioning of
district and municipal councils, planning and budgeting process of local government, especially on budget allocations. Their training also includes analytical tools for enhancing capacity to engage in local planning, monitoring the planning process and demanding accountability.

A third level of information creation are the regularly programmed specialised information programmes, mainly through radio, for farmers, women, youth or other focused interests such as those engaged in the informal economy. Often there are specialised programmes on health, human rights, local government affairs, religious activities, civic education and many other specific public information needs. These programmes can be aimed at networks of grassroots groups such as farmers or women's organisations. These programmes can also be designed to respond to special information needs, public information campaigns, responding to questions, the circulation of information by organisations in the field with field interviews spreading the local knowledge of one group to many other groups, studio debates, occasional expert talks on particular problems or many other formats that respond to informational needs of the public. Again, although some commercial and state media have such programmes, this kind of information is best supplied by educational and community radio that has extensive time dedicated to informational services. Unfortunately, the public media policy in Africa tends to favor commercial media over educational and community media.

The methods of communication to enhance participatory action must be carefully designed to insure that people at the grassroots are involved in the creation of communication at all stages. In the case of KIHACHA (a programme of education for food security) described above, the methods included local campaigns in which the villagers themselves have conducted campaign meetings. Village-based activists, focus groups, lobbyists and cultural groups were involved. Village activists were also employed to stimulate discussion using Kiswahili or local languages and with the help of visual materials and poetry. There were feedback workshops at village, district and national levels. Kasiaka (2004) emphasizes that such village meetings can be an effective communication channel.

A fourth level of information creation is that aimed specifically at a particular network of organizations of women, farmers, cooperatives, networks of small industries or other kind of structured organisation. This often has specialised information aimed at small-scale economic enterprises and provides information to resolve specific problems of productivity, marketing, national policy and legislation, or any other information that may be necessary for the economic and political betterment of this group. This may be aimed at improving the general economic status of a minority group or group that suffers violation of rights. Often this is an organisational movement and the organisational structure is a major channel of information. At times, when there is a major issue at stake such as national legislation, this kind of information source may go into a period of intensive informational activity and coordination. These information creators often use a combined ‘multi-media approach’: leaders or representatives in communities to provide interpersonal information, paraprofessionals who live in the community but have some training to supervise community-level organisations, action groups.
exchanging local knowledge and discussing problems around experimental trials of new methods, a radio or print media source that follows the local activities, contact with professional expertise and now video and Internet.

In a multi-media approach, popular theatre is often used, especially when there are deep emotional resistances to change. The people decide the dramatic story line, write the scenario, produce the drama and then hold a discussion about the play afterwards. In many African contexts, it is common to have considerable intervention from the audience during the performance. Popular theatre is used in Tanzania especially by RIPS, the Local Government Reform Programme, by KIHACHA (education for food security) and other groups. Hatar emphasizes, however, that it is not merely the use of theatre, but rather participatory theatre that is rooted in the local community. This is a medium 'suited for programmes of sensitisation and mobilization' (Hatar, 2005:156). He adds that such theatre facilitates expression of local problems, needs and priorities, integrates folk and traditional culture and engages local community members.

A fifth and more focused type of information creation are the programmes and campaigns which aim to set up a particular type of productive activity such as a new crop variety, a new organisational or governmental institution or any other established activity. This information creation may have a very focused training for special roles in a new institutional organisation, but it is important that it allow the local people the freedom to decide the kind of organisation they know best, the freedom to use local knowledge in the process of training, the freedom to choose local leadership in the way that people feel is best, opening a space for the indigenous and traditional forms of communication that the people know best, and how the organisation is going to fit into the local community, district and regional structure of communication.

**Information resource centres for participatory action**

The idea of information resource centres has surfaced in different contexts in Tanzania. In a conference on 'participatory resource networks' in Dar es Salaam in 1997 a proposal was made to create a national resource centre that would help 'to manage dissemination of participatory experiences, will coordinate policy advocacy and provide linkage with international initiatives' (Devavaran and Msalya, 1998). Unfortunately, there is no evidence that this idea has been implemented. Nevertheless, community information centers are also being encouraged, and one exists already in Sengerema in northwestern Tanzania that was created with the support of the Tanzania Science and Technology Commission (COSTECH), International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada and the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Some of those centres have been conceptualised purely in technological terms and as such can play only a limited role as community empowerment. One could predict that the community information resource centre at Sengerema in northwestern Tanzania that was planned as a very capital-intensive project and employs an IT graduate is doomed to fail unless it is redesigned in terms of its objectives, content,
communication methodology and sustainability. The methods of information resource centres with a potential to support participatory action can also be found in some of the better known civil society groups of Tanzania such as Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA), Tanzania Gender Network Programme (TGNP), HakiElimu (engaged in education campaigns), and HakiKazi, (engaged in labour rights campaigns). These organisations distribute leaflets and brochures, provide public notice boards and make available a place for local popular theatre groups (Personal interviews, 2007).

Community Information Resource Centres can provide materials for personal self advancement and activities aimed at collective 'citizen action' (Mchombu, 2004) Other useful information deals with the use of local natural resources, appropriate technologies, credit opportunities, markets, demography and access to education and health services, local culture and indigenous knowledge system, and research findings of relevance to local communities. (Mchombu and Cadbury, 2006). The lessons from Chiwamba Community Information Centre in Malawi suggest that centres like this can effectively provide not only educational materials but also locally produced pamphlets on agriculture, health and literacy. These centres also give training for starting small businesses and for dealing with problems of agriculture and health. Such centres can be a place for meetings and video shows. Radio listening groups are also convened regularly at the Centre (Mchombu and Cadbury, 2006)

The sustainability of community information centres in Tanzania is a matter of serious concern especially if they rely heavily on external funding. For example, the Teachers Resource Centres that were started by the help of Aide et Action in Magu and Missungwi Districts could not be integrated into district government plans and budgets, and so most of them ended being unable to operate effectively. In Tanzania, the Teachers Resource Centres and Folk Development Colleges, if they are properly revitalised and have the help of a national information resource office, could house such community information centers. A centre does not need to be too costly. In the case of Chiwamba in Malawi only an information assistant operates it, and a local committee with the Malawi National Library Service manages it. What is being argued here is that information resource centres should be located in existing local structures with local supervision to avoid costly investment. The centres will provide a service only when the local community takes the initiative to set it up and local governmental bodies see them as part of their activities.

The importance of focusing information and communication on specific action goals

Participatory action is most significant in contexts where popular participation in public decisions is relatively low. This implies a process of social change in which popular movements gradually develop into fairly stable organisations and civil society pressure groups. Such movements transformed into organisations function best when they emerge out of the traditional forms of communication and organisation. The organisation then becomes the source of communication building
a new socio-economic-political culture. Too often, a particular action is mounted as a relatively short-term campaign that does not have long-term results.

The case of KIHACHA (education for food security) of the University of Dar es Salaam, well documented by Mbilinyi (2005), is illustrative of this problem. The key goals were to strengthen village governance, local assembly and the local community's self-organising capacity. In particular KIHACHA aimed to transform social relations and governance structures so that these would become a form of participatory democracy driven by demands by grassroots people and activists. Thus the project sought to build the capacity of grassroots people and activists to organise and lobby for 'the right to food, land and democracy', to provide opportunity for different groups to participate in structures of policy making, and to increase public understanding about the right to food by way of public debate.

Mbilinyi (2005) points out that amongst other things the project resulted in large numbers of villagers attending meetings, 'enthusiasm and commitment' in meetings and increased confidence demonstrated by the ability of common villagers to speak with 'power and determination'. Furthermore, regular village assemblies and district level meetings were held in a participatory way, regular reports were presented including those for local budgets and external resources to the villages and districts. But, as Mbilinyi adds, this was not without creating uneasiness in government. The more fundamental question is whether this created a more permanent organisation with capacity for generating its own continued communication processes, or did the programme cease when the funds for the project ran out?

Undoubtedly, the experts and institutions geared to empowering people must be concerned about the direction or outcomes of their empowerment process and should feel accountable for wrong or unwanted outcomes. The goal of all participatory action and participatory communication is to eliminate the sources of potential disruptive and destructive violence. Clearly there is a right to civil action, even peaceful civil disobedience in the Gandhian tradition, but if the intention of empowerment is to generate destructive violence, such as the storming of police stations, burning buildings or taking lives such as happened in Kenya recently, this obviously cannot be defended. Similarly, if the action generates only long and unproductive debates with a government, a debate that does not aim at creating permanent legislation and institutions of participation, then this is hardly defensible. On this basis one could argue that a debate on educational rights like that of HakiElimu with the Government of Tanzania of 2005-2007 is unfortunate because it did not produce significant, long-term participatory institutional changes. (Mongula, 2007). In this debate HakiElimu was questioning achievements in the education sector and sponsoring newspaper and TV messages critical of the education sector. The Government reacted rather harshly by banning HakiElimu from doing research in schools.

Servaes emphasises that organising a participatory communication process requires capacity for good management. It is a waste if materials that cost a lot of money to prepare are simply not delivered nor used by the targeted groups or if theatre groups are paid but do not perform or whose performances have low turn-ups.
Experts not only need to have skills of popular empowerment, but they also need to have a good understanding of how a particular action contributes to a long-term process of economic development and strengthening of participatory democracy. Furthermore, they need to be familiar with the local situation, including resources, constraints and opportunities/potentials and above all to have carefully designed, simplified information packages. The results don’t have to be empowerment per se but empowerment and capacity building for economic and social transformation. All this will be a greater service to the people if it is directed toward poverty elimination, increased productivity, strengthening the informal economy and general economic development which seeks wealth distribution. The answers to those problems lie in using multiple communication means, to engage actively with local communities toward participatory identification of local challenges, priorities, and local information needs, to assess different technologies of communication and selecting the appropriate communication strategies, and capacity building in information and communication for development (Mchombu and Cadbury, 2006).

There is a growing realisation in many African governments of the importance of communication among all the stakeholders of the various programmes. Evidence of this awareness in Tanzania is the creation of Information, Education and Communication offices in government departments, the emphasis on communication in the National Strategy for Growth and Reduction of Poverty, and the use of social marketing health campaigns like the TB and malaria campaigns. The government's communication strategy identifies a wide range of channels such as mass media, interpersonal sharing, publications, newsletter, Internet, websites, community information centres, and documentation centres. The strategy includes use of village notice boards and the repackaging of outputs from the poverty monitoring system in attractive formats such as film, video, brochures and posters according to communication contexts and particular audience needs. The strategy includes information ranging from agricultural marketing, farming methods, and environmental sustainability, to investment possibilities in agro-processing. Unfortunately, in all of this there is still a strong 'top-down' emphasis and a relative ignorance of participatory communication methods.

Conclusions

In the present article, we have taken Tanzania as a not untypical case among African countries to assess the 'real world' possibilities of grassroots, participatory communication on a national scale. Tanzania would seem to offer greater opportunities for a participatory model of development because the original development vision of 'ujamaa' was precisely, in theory at least, a strategy of development based on village organisation and grassroots initiatives.

In practice the strategy had to begin with the colonial state control system with its regional and district offices and with the centralised communication, transport, and governance system left by the colonial state. The people in the independence movement wanted education, health and all other modern benefits - fast. The
independence government instituted a rapid 'catching up', modernisation development policy which could work, many thought, only with centralised planning and a strong-state centralised command model of development. Independent peasant and labor organisations, student organisations and virtually all grassroots organisational efforts were crushed because of fear that it would detract from the power of the state to command a development process.

What has come into existence is a corporatist governing elite working through a political party and state apparatus that controls virtually all major institutions of the nation: industrial entrepreneurial activity, foreign investment, the funds flowing from foreign donor agencies, the banking system, education and health facilities, all marketing, and transport. Although there are vestiges of an elite independent press operating in the national capital, this has relatively little influence among the masses of the people in the interior of the nation. Furthermore, there are some significant civil society movements, especially among educated women, but strong labour and peasant organisations with an extensive existence throughout the nation are extremely weak. Leaders in these organisations are easily co-opted, silenced, and marginalised by the governing elite. The civil society organisations have relatively little influence on the political and economic life of the nation. In some countries of the world, the churches, the universities, the intellectuals and other institutions which pretend to be the 'conscience of the nation' have a significant voice, but in Tanzania all these institutions are morally quiet and dormant. When there are significant violations of human rights, there are few outcries of protest. There have been major efforts to increase access to education at the secondary and tertiary level, but unless there is a much stronger and aggressive organisation of university-trained professionals, it is not clear that the increased number of lawyers, doctors, teachers, journalists or other professionals will bring much reform. In Tanzania, most young people - with significant exceptions - believe that one's future does not lie in questioning the power and corruption of the governing elite, but becoming part of them. Those who do question feel quite unable to realise their beliefs.

One does not find in Tanzania a strong movement of grassroots participatory communication. There are only a few examples of authentic community radio or other forms of media which have grassroots participation and cultivate a vigorous debate at the local level. Although the civil society organisations mentioned above have attempted to introduce participatory forms of communication, these generally have been short-lived. One does not find in Tanzania extensive application of popular theatre, methods of consciousness-raising communication or community information resource centres. Grassroots, participatory action groups generally cannot get the information they need to improve their economic situation through skills development and access to technology, enhanced markets and credit opportunities.

The progressive integration of Tanzania into a global economy largely controlled by the Breton Woods institutions tends to reinforce the power of the governing elite and seriously undermines people's participation. The gains from so-called record-level economic growth are only increasing the economic disparities between the poor and rich and adding to the growing burden of the poor who are
struggling to cope with continually rising prices of food, transport, cooking fuel and water. The initiatives to encourage the poor toward entrepreneurial activities are not of much help either as this is only saturating an informal sector already marked with poverty without contributing to production of new products or services. Politically, the growing alliance between politicians/public officials and entrepreneurs, the muzzling of mass media and press freedom by political and economic heavy weights and excessive corruption during elections are undermining chances for meaningful and fruitful participation for public interest.

Such is the situation of grassroots, participatory communication in Tanzania, and there is little evidence that the situation of Tanzania is unique among African countries.

Are there any signs of vitality and growth of an alternative future in which participatory democracy might become a central value in national life? At least one can say that there is a great deal of dissatisfaction with the present economic, political and cultural stagnation that the present governing elite has brought to the country. The progress, if any, is much too slow in spite of government rhetoric. There is also a great deal of dissatisfaction with the authoritarian and often corrupt and inefficient way that virtually all organisations are run, especially in the public sector. There is great frustration with the fact that the initiatives, good ideas, talents, and desire to introduce more efficient methods are often ignored. The young especially want a more participatory mode of decision making in virtually all organisations in all sectors. One clear evidence of this is the desire of young professionals to get out of the public sector and the preference of many of the economic organisations to found their own NGOs. Whether the purpose is their own economic benefit or to offer better services is not entirely clear.

Another hopeful sign is the spread of the conviction in many institutions - at least at the verbal level - that the model of grassroots participatory action and communication presented above in this article will foster a much more dynamic process of development. There is a complete turn-around from the modernisation model in recent years. What are needed are intermediate organisations between professional schools and professional action which are opening a space of discussion and training for new participatory approaches in virtually all sectors, from agricultural development and education to local government and community organisation.

References


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Building processes in Mtwara and Lindi Regions, Tanzania. RIPS Mtwara and Lindi, Tanzania.


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