Warning Won’t Do It: Analysis of Communication Strategies for Enhancing Food Production in Nigeria

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Abstract
This study set out to explore the communication strategies for promoting agriculture in Nigeria and enhancing food production. A total of 32 postgraduate students from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (16 male and 16 female) provided narratives through a semi-structured interview that lasted between 30 minutes to one hour. Thematic analysis guide was used in the analysis of data for the study. The result showed that persuasive message contents which educate and inform emerged as an important strategy. It was also found that audience segmentation in agricultural communicating message is a very cardinal strategy. Finally, findings showed that strategic choice of media that takes care of the special needs of the target audience is a vibrant strategy for promoting agriculture and enhancing food production in Nigeria. Implications of these results on the ACADA model and media campaigns on agriculture were also pointed out.

Key words: agricultural communication, analysis, hunger and strategies

Introduction
Nigeria’s Minister of Agriculture, Audu Ogbe, during the defence of the Ministry’s budget for 2016 before the National Assembly revealed that Nigerians will starve to death by 2050 if nothing is done. The Minister had revealed that given the current rate of population growth, there was a need to change farming approaches from a seasonal exercise to an all-year round venture. The revelation of the Minister was just a sad reminder on the precarious hunger situation in Nigeria. For example, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) (2014) in its Global Hunger Index (GHI) grouped Nigeria among countries with a high level of hunger threat, with an index of 14.7. The report noted that higher index scores indicate higher level of hunger threat in rated countries. The report further placed the level of hunger threat in Nigeria as “serious.” The latest edition (2016) presents an even more disturbing figure as Nigeria has an index score of 25.5 which was still classified as serious hunger threat. Statistics from International Food Policy Research Institute (2015) showed that Nigeria has a long history of hunger threat. For instance, the International Food Policy Research Institute Global Hunger Index showed that Nigeria had an index score of 47.7 in 1990, 47.1 in 1995, 41.0 in 2000, 35.2 in 2005 and 32.8 in 2015. According to the Institute, an index score of between 35.0-49.9 was considered as alarming hunger threat while 20.0-34.9
was classified as serious hunger threat. What this means is that from 1990-2000, the hunger threat in Nigeria was alarming and it is currently classified as serious.

Also, according to the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Godwin Emefiele, N1.18 trillion was spent between January 2014 and May 2015 on food imports along with toothpicks, textiles and furniture. Top on the import list were rice, fish and milk. Yet, the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation says the country has 19 million head of cattle, the largest in Africa; 82 million of its 91 million-hectare land area is arable, while the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development estimates that the country’s coasts, rivers, lakes and streams make 230 billion cubic metres of water available for fishing and aquaculture (Punch 2015). Also, according to World Bank (2014) in its World Development Indicators, 63.1% of Nigerians population live below $1.25 a day while 83.1% live below $2 a day. Therefore, the revelation by the Agricultural Ministers calls for worry on how to avert the situation. It is important to add here that mere warning without steps to address the situation is not enough as doing so will be likened to a toothless dog barking. This calls for creative application of agricultural skills because Nigeria is blessed with enough fertile land. Hanson and Leautier (2013) in a study of 48 countries in Africa (Nigeria inclusive) submitted that the main drivers, among others, appear to be the creative use of the agricultural sector and the level of innovation and sophistication in agriculture. One of the ways to drive the agricultural sector is through communication.

The role of communication as the driver of all human activities is non-contestable. What this means is that communication occupies a central role in promoting agricultural activities. However, such communication must be done within a defined strategy. The strategies could include: use of different media options, making the messages as persuasive as possible and as well as use of extension workers, among others. This study, thus, investigated communication strategies for enhancing food production in Nigeria.

**Statement of the Problem**

Nigerians face a hunger threat as admitted by the Agricultural Minister during his defence of his Ministry’s budget for 2016. Already existing figures revealed that Nigeria is facing a serious hunger situation. Therefore, for the Honourable Minister to reveal that Nigerians may starve to death is made matters worse. Scholars (e.g Andohol, 2012; Ejem, C. & Ejem, A. (2014; ) have argued that communication has the potential of driving change and making the society a better place. Existing literature (e.g. Fechter, 2012; Ariyo, Ariyo, Okelola, Aasa, Awotide, Aaron, & Oni, 2013) also suggest that communication, if properly applied could develop agriculture. However, literature on the strategies for enhancing food product in Nigeria through agriculture is scanty. This scanty literature limits researchers’ understanding of how agriculture can enhance food production in Nigeria, hence the need for this study.

**Objectives of the Study**

This study sought to achieve the following:
• To determine the message development strategy for enhancing food production in Nigeria through agricultural communication.
• To examine the target audience understanding strategy, by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, for enhancing food production in Nigeria through agricultural communication.
• To ascertain the media use strategy by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, for enhancing food production in Nigeria through agricultural communication.

Research Questions
This study sought answers to the following questions:
• What is the message development strategy for enhancing food production in Nigeria through agricultural communication?
• What is the target audience understanding strategy by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, for enhancing food production in Nigeria through agricultural communication?
• What is the media use strategy by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, for enhancing food production in Nigeria through agricultural communication?

Communication Strategy for Enhancing Food Production
Communication strategy describes an overall blueprint aimed at promoting a defined cause. Pattison (2011) defines a communication strategy as a holistic planning approach to engaging a brand’s audience to ensure greater effectiveness. The Government Communication Service (2014) defines a communication strategy as a single, coherent narrative that describes a communications solution to a problem or bundle of problems. Working at a strategic level, it sets out: the nature of the problem or challenge, the key considerations in addressing it, the choices that have been made, the key drivers of those decisions (crucially, insight into audiences), and the resources required. Bonk, Griggs and
Tynes provide the following as the chart flow for communication strategy.

Adapted from Bonk, Griggs & Tynes, 1999

The chart flow above showed that communication strategy takes place in a chart-flow-like format. According to the chart flow, at first, organizations have to come up with a mission, to ascertain what they are going to try to do for the community. To have a successful communication strategy, an initial process must be developed and maintain a focus on the original goal. Goals and self-check, which are the next two branches of a communication strategy, are intertwined and dependent upon each other. The goals of the organization are a set of ideas that must be checked regularly. To begin with, it has the audience of the organization so as to effectively reach them (Crooks, Lally & McCarthy 2007). The chart flow ends with evaluation, an indication that communication strategy has to be assessed based on its objectives to ascertain the success rate. It is important to add here that this chart flow was designed based on organizational communication. This, thus, makes it inappropriate for agricultural promotion. The researcher, therefore, identified three basic components from the flow which will guide agricultural communication strategy as follow: the media of communication, the message contents and the target receivers. In other words, these three components define agricultural communication strategy.

There exist some empirical studies that fall within the scope of these three-media, message and target. First, Aboh, Ogbonna and Ndion (2007) investigated...
Communication outreach strategies utilized by agricultural extension agents in Imo State and found that farm and home visit, method demonstration, field day, informal discussion, result demonstration, calendar of farm work, agricultural shows, model farmer, field trip methods are the commonly used communication outreach strategies by agricultural extension agents in the study area.

Osikabor, Oladele and Ogunlade (2011) investigated worth assessment of information and their access points by small scale cassava farmers in Nigeria and found that among the information worth assessment of the various information access points, interpersonal communication was consistently rated highest in four of the worth assessment criteria: motivation ability (77.7%), regularity (96.3%), relevance of information (83.4%) and use (96.7%). Radio was rated as the most persistent (68.5%), compared to 62.6% for interpersonal communication.

Olaniyi and Adewale (2012) examined information on maize production among rural youth and found that majority (99.1%) of the respondents accessed agricultural information from radio, followed by fellow young farmers (89.0%); extension agents (80.4%); commercial input dealers (71.6%); cooperative societies (77.8%); parents (70.5%); mobile phone (GSM) (60.7%); newspapers (61.5%); town crying (50.5%); friends/ neighbours (61.3%) and agricultural shows (51.0%).

Olaniyi and Adewale earlier (2011) investigated Nigerian rural youths’ utilisation of agricultural information on selected arable crops and reported that technical information on how to accomplish a task was rated higher and often used by the young farmers on selected arable crops (cassava and maize) than government policies and information on marketing. The result also revealed that for every unit increase in the marital status, membership of social organization, perception of utilisation score and age of the respondents, their level of utilisation of agricultural information increases. Vice versa.

Theoretical Support
This study was anchored on the ACADA model. The model stands for Assessment, Communication, Analysis Design and Action. The model was developed by the United Nations for International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF 2001, p.8). This model is informed by the fact that influencing or modifying human behaviour through communication is a complex process that needs to be planned carefully. The ACADA model is a model designed to bring about development in which attitudinal change is a core element (Omego 2014, p.143). Ajibade (2011) cited in Okorie (2013, pp.153-54) explains the stages of the model as follows:

**Assessment Stage.** - This is the first stage of the ACADA model which main crux is researching in to the real situation as well as knowing its nature, characteristics, history and current status, those involved and the social cultural environment. A critical activity at this state is the determination of the problem to be addressed. Okoro (2005) holds that the assessment stage helps the communicator to examine the vital issues at stake.

**Communication Analysis.** - Specifically, communication analysis under the ACADA model involves eight activities. They are: Analysis and formulation of the problem, determination of problem to address, behaviour analysis, participant analysis, channel
analysis/ media analysis, statement of communication objectives, identification of communication strategy and activities, development of monitory and evaluation indicators. This means that different communication objectives, strategies, messages and contents are required to address problem behaviours of various participants (Okorie 2013).

**Design stage.** Here, messages meant for the diverse intended groups are packaged with regards to the information gotten from the evaluation and communication analysis stage. The message is designed through the instrument of persuasion, enlightenment and full information. The communication materials and messages are to be pretested and modified in line with the programme objectives. (Okorie 2013).

**Action:** This is where what is planned is implemented in order to achieve communication objectives. For this study, it is the stage where the agricultural communication strategies will be implemented.

This model is relevant to the current study because it gives insight on how to promote agricultural communication among farmers. According to the model, any effort to promote agricultural communication should first of all assess the current situation on ground before designing the communication plan that will eventually be implemented.

**Methods**

**Participants**
The respondents for this study were 16 males and 16 females (making a total of 32 respondents) post graduate students at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Of this number, 16 were from Mass Communication while the remaining 16 were from Agricultural Extension. In each case, 8 Doctoral students and 8 master’s students were selected. This was to provide balance for the study.

The researchers used purposive sampling technique to select participants for this study because it is usually the most preferred technique for qualitative research considering that it provides the platform for participants to express themselves almost unrestricted (Babbie 2013). Consequently, the researchers purposively selected the subjects. Selecting the subject was not a challenge because the researchers were also from the University of Nigeria. Therefore, the potential participants were contacted individually and requested to participate in the study. Those who accepted were further requested to supply their contact details for further information on the study.

**Data Collection**
We collected data for this study through in-depth, semi-structured interviews that lasted for 30 minutes to one hour. We recorded all the interviews with the aid of two trained research assistants. All the interviews took place at the University’s Postgraduate Hall based on the agreements between the research team and the participants. Each interview started with an explanation of the aim of the study - to learn about the communication strategies for enhancing food production in Nigeria. Consequently, the respondents were told to sign a consent form. The interview began with a broad question: “Can you
tell me communication strategies that can be used to enhance food production in Nigeria?” Follow-up questions were asked to guide and get clarifications from the participants.

**Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was adopted to identify, analyse and report what Brawn and Clark (2006, p.79) christen ‘patterns’ within the data that were gathered. The guide to the phases of conducting the thematic analysis was rigorously followed. These are: familiarity with the data, gathering initial code, searching for themes (vital concepts, explanatory ideas, recurring ideas etc.); reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes and producing the report in form of illustrative quotes. Therefore, after the interview, all the interviews were transcribed word-to-word to enable the researchers effect the analysis. As a follow up, the researchers identified codes related to communication strategies for enhancing food production in Nigeria. We then searched for themes under three broad categories: the communication channel, message and the target recipients. As a follow-up, we reviewed our themes and define them under the three broad categories stated earlier before producing the final reports.

**Results**

The respondents who took part in the study reported that communication is very essential for the promotion of agriculture. According to the study participants, effective communication is very pivotal to the promotion of agriculture in Nigeria. The participants also reported that Nigeria’s food challenges can be addressed through well marshalled out communication strategies. The result of this study is presented under the following sub-headings: message development strategy, target audience understanding strategy and media use strategy.

**Message Development Strategy**

Generally, the respondents reported that the message for promoting agriculture in Nigeria has to be properly crafted such that it educates and at the same time persuade people to get involved in agriculture. The respondents reported that agriculture has image problem, especially among the educated youth who are ill-disposed to it. The participants also reported that the contents should be as simple as possible so as not to give room for any ambiguity. One of the participants said:

> The message of agricultural promotion is a very important strategy. It must be compelling. To be compelling, the message should provide details on the importance of agriculture, how to invest in it as well as how to manage agriculture. The message must educate the public on new farming techniques as well as how to use them. The message must also provide information on other countries’ agricultural ventures and how they were able to achieve such feat.

Generally, the respondents reported that the message is an important strategy in agricultural development and should be packaged in a manner that will compel action.
The message must therefore, persuade educate and inform. There was no difference in the submission of both agriculture and communication respondents.

**Audience Understanding Strategy**
The study participants reported that one of the strategies is to segment the audience and treat them based on their peculiar characteristics. According to the participants, agriculture is a very special sphere of the society because that is where the food comes from. The study participants were of the view that considering difference in people’s behaviour, communication aimed at encouraging people to invest in agriculture should also take this into consideration. One of the participants noted:

> People differ and so does their behaviour. Therefore, to avert hunger in Nigeria and promote agriculture, people should be segmented based on their gender, location, educational level, employment status, religion, marital status, family size, among other demographics. This understanding will guide in the communication of agricultural information.

Generally, the participants reported that full knowledge of the target audience is very essential for agricultural communication to be effective. The participants revealed that food production in Nigeria can be enhanced if its public are segmented and communicated to on a one-on-one basis.

**Media Use Strategy**
The respondents reported that the choice of media is very important in developing agriculture through communication. They said that care should be taken in deciding the media to use, the time and day of the week. The participants were of the view that radio should be used to reach the local people, TV for those in towns and cities, social media and the Internet for youth. One of the respondents put it thus:

> The media to use is a very central strategy when using communication to enhance food production in Nigeria. The choice of media must be decided by the target segment of the society. The message contents should also influence the media strategy but on the whole, the medium is very important because it is actually the message.

During the discussion, the participants noted that the overall media strategy should be such that takes care of the individual needs of the Nigerian people. In sum the participants stressed that the media strategy should cover the choice of media, the timing of the media use and the way the media are used.

**Discussion of Findings**
The results of this study showed that most of the respondents reported that the message for promoting agriculture in Nigeria has to be properly crafted such that it educates and at the same time persuade people to get involved in agriculture. This result is similar to the postulation of the ACADA model which presents the message content as very essential in behaviour change communication. Okoro (2005) argues that the ACADA of communication is better understood as a cyclical strategy commencing from an

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assessment of the situation to communication analysis, to design to action and then back to assessment to communication programme improvement. Okorie (2013) avers that the packaging of the message is an essential strategy to consider when packaging behaviour change communication. Based on the result of this study, we posit that as one of the strategies of averting looming hunger in Nigeria, communication message must be persuasive, informative and educative.

The result of this study also showed that one of the strategies for enhancing food production in Nigeria through communication is to segment the audience and treat them based on their peculiar characteristics. This result is consistent with the study of Olaniyi and Adewale (2011) who reported that demographics like family size, age, household size, among others, influence information consumption patterns. Based on the result of this study, the researchers argue that an understanding of the target receivers of agricultural information is an important strategy for enhancing food production in Nigeria through agricultural communication.

Finally, the result of this study showed that the choice of media is very important in developing agriculture through communication. It was found that to be effective, such media must take into account of the location, educational level, religion and other demographics of the respondents. This result is consistent with that of Aboh, Ogbonna and Ndifon (2007) who reported that the media use strategies play a major role in agricultural communication. The basic contribution of this study is that it has provided evidence-based understanding on how to apply communication to enhance food production in Nigeria.

**Conclusion/ Recommendations**

Based on the result of this study, we conclude that the strategies for enhancing food production in Nigeria must revolve around the message of the communication which must be compelling, and educative, the segmentation of the audience as well as proper choice of media. Although the study has provided result on the communication strategies for enhancing food production in Nigeria, we need to know also from the perspective of farmers how best communication can serve their agricultural needs. Such perspective will throw more light on the enquiry.

Although this study may not have provided definite answers to fundamental questions, it provides an evidence-based rationale for investigating the communication strategies for enhancing food production in Nigeria. In view of the findings of this study, we that Communication aimed at enhancing food production in Nigeria should be very persuasive, educative and informative. There is the need for audience segmentation as a communication strategy for promoting agriculture in Nigeria. Also, proper application of the media should be adopted as a strategy for using communication to promote agriculture and enhance food production in Nigeria. Finally, in this era of growing acceptance of the Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM), its application for the purpose of promoting agricultural activities will go a long way in enhancing food production.
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