
AN OVERVIEW OF NIGERIA'S NATIONAL COMMUNICATION POLICY AND STRATEGY FROM 1999 TO 2018**Maggai Tsokwa,**

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Abstract

The subtle power of a country is coordinated with the quantity and quality of information available to the citizen. With the terrain and frontier of communication having changed drastically, it is crucial for Nigeria to have a robust National communication policy and strategy which will serve as a nerve centre for where other communication effort at different levels of government and private sector will be drawn. It is in view of this that this paper examines the Nigeria's national communication policy and strategy from 1999 to 2018 in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the draft policy document. The paper argues that the major weakness of the policy include the absence of strong continuous public involvement and consistent private sector participation. The paper concluded by identifying major gaps in the current National Communication Policy as well as recommended possible options and strategies needed to make Nigeria a communicating nation.

Keywords: National, Communication, Policy, Strategy.

Introduction

According to Iredia (2017, p.22), “the pattern of communication in Nigeria has over the years been poor.” As policy hardly gets to the populace. The people are always in the dark about a policy especially the roles they are to play to ensure its success. Indeed, the apparent disconnect between the government and the people, is due largely to poor public communication flow. However, because the real target of any public policy is the people the general public ought to be conversant with any matter of public interest.

Communication policy offers the operational framework for understanding the operations, regulations and general behaviour of the conventional and alternative mass media systems, their operation and functions, and allied sectors

like public relations, advertising, film, interpersonal communication, traditional means of communication, media and society and economic, societal and political as well as technological factors that are linked particularly to public communication.

McQuail (2000) identified three evolutionary trend of communication policies to include; the transitional phase between 1920s to 1945, which was dominated by incorporation of emerging technological innovations in radio, television and film; the second phase lasted from 1945 through the 1980/90s, this period was characterised by rancorous contestations on the role of the media in societies by scholars and critical professionals. The third phase started in the 1990s to the present time. This period is characterized by the search for new communication policy model to explain

deregulation, convergence and interlinking of different forms of media, (Pate and Gwadabe, 2017). The clarion call for the articulation and implementation of national communication policies on Africa and Latin America was provided by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) during the 1970s and 1980s New World Information and Communication Order (NNICO) debates. For instance, in Africa, Matumaini (2010) maintains that the Africa cannot continue to be dependent on other countries in the communication sector.

From the foregoing, the major issues that call for concern in this paper is that there were speculations that National Communication Policy in Nigeria, and by extension in Africa ignores largely the needs and aspirations of the people, also many communication policies are not based on research and careful planning, as policies were introduced in reaction to crisis which usually led to lack of implementation. This paper explores these challenges with a view to providing panacea to national communication policies somersault in Nigeria from 1999 to 2018.

Communication Policy

A policy is usually a cause of action. Often time, people infer policy from practice. Policy can also be deriving from practice, although one may run on the danger of contradiction of explicit policy. The Encarta Dictionary (2008) defined policy as a course of action a programme of action adopted by a person, group or government..."

Opubor, Akingbulu & Ojebode, (2010) see national communication policy as a careful consistent and workable plan of action formulated by government or any other agency to harness the benefits of the process of communication for the well being of the people. The emphasis on the care in formulating the policy is to ensure that all aspects of the national life are taken into account and the ramifications of the policies are well appreciated or anticipated by the formulators; consistency in the

execution of the policy to guarantee that its implementation promotes fair play, justice and equity; and workability of the policy to ensure that it is fully implemented. The communication policy should be such that would contribute meaningfully to the attainment of national objectives.

For Maduka (2017, p.12), a policy is a "set of rules, guides that set down the dos and don'ts governing a course of action. This means an agreed plan of action in the communication / information field. Public policy is no doubt what government chooses to do or not to do but it is owned not by the government but by the people. On whose behalf government supposedly functions.

Strategy

This refers to the framework or an agreed plan of action in the communication field. No doubt Maduka (2017, p.18) sees strategy as "a systematic timeline from conception to operation". And in the case of this study, the strategy set out for national communication policy should include assessing:

- (a) Where we are at present, in the process of developing a national communication policy agency;
- (b) Where we want to be in the process in the future, at the earliest possible date;
- (c) How we get there. We need a systematic plan, (a road map).
- (d) How we evaluate our progress and success.

Communication

The concept of communication has been defined differently by different scholars. For the purpose of this study, communication can be defined as the transmission of messages from one person to another. Also we could define communication "as the process of transmitting information" (Iredia 2017, p.26). All living entities, beings and creatures communicate through sounds, reactions, physical exchange, movement, gestures, language in the best possible way to make others aware of their thoughts. Therefore, communication is not a haphazard phenomenon that can casually be handled.

While information deals with content only, communication extends to include the context that is how content is prepared and delivered.

In contemporary world of technology the superiority of communication over information is clear. Johnson and Alao (2013) argued that information is power while communication is empowerment.

Status of the Nigeria Communication Policy

Of recent, there is no formal policy in use nor is there any known functional agency besides, perhaps, the regulators in the communication and information sectors, (Akinfeule, 2017). This assertion was supported by Maduka (2017, p.19) that “the status of the communication technology / facilities was still analogue and in many areas, poor in both spread and adequacy”.

Judging from the above scholarly submission, one will not be totally out of place to agreed that there is absence of a consensus ideology as far as the status of Nigeria National Communication Policy is concerned. Be that as it may, where we want to be in the matter of a National Communication Policy is to have an agency in place that will set the ball rolling, aiming at making Nigeria a communication nation.

Nigeria's National Communication Policy and Strategy from 1999-2018

The centrality of communication in society development according to Iredia (2017, p.26) is that “communication virtually divides human existence into two parts: namely actions and in actions, and the awareness by people of such actions or in-actions”. Societal development is often premised on the implementation of what is planned to be done. If however what is actually executed is not known to have been done, it would naturally be regarded as not done. This is why every nation must seek to have a communication policy which places public enlightenment on the front line.

Such a policy is expected to detail the following:

What is expected to be done; what has been done; what remains to be done; and the strategies put in place to facilitate the actualization of the policy including the role of citizens in the process. Thus any nation in search of development must strive to evolve a development plan alongside a communication policy and strategy.

The Nigeria Experience

Over (17) years after United Nations Educational, Scientific and cultural organization (UNESCO) declaration of 1970s communication decade, Nigeria's National Communication Policy and Strategy is still at the draft stage. Since then, not much has been done at articulating a communication policy for the nation. After independent in 1960, the first effort was in February 1987 when academia, communicators and journalist with government stakeholders converged in Administrative staff college of Nigeria (ASCON) to evolved a draft communication policy for the nation. Oso, (2012) affirmed that the ASCON seamier produced a draft document with 10 cardinal objectives, which Adeyanju (2017, p.2) contend that “it failed to incorporate the changing nature of communication in the computer and the post computer age”.

Several years later, government set up a review committee in 2004 to take a second look at the 1987 Nation Communication Policy and Strategy that was made public in 1990, with a view to updating it in line with the contemporary realities. The review according to Adekoye and Ajilore (2012) was probably a reaction to the fact that the policy was mundane and some notable gaps was observed. Among other things, the 2014 team suggested the need to create a more conducive environment for the organs of Mass Communication to thrive in Nigeria. The Government of Nigeria on returns to democracy ordered a review of the 1990 National Mass Communication policy in mid-2004. The 24-member review committee was chaired by former Information Minister, Chief Ayo Ogunlade. In this regard, the team, having observed the healthy concentration of the media resources and infrastructures in the hands of a few elites, called for the adoption of the principle of pluralism of ownership and control.

While the print media got waiver of the value Added Tax (VAT) on the cover prices of newspapers, magazines and other periodicals. The same print media was suggested to provide incentives such as single digit import and excise duties equipment, newsprint, ink and other production inputs of the industry

(Iredia 2017). For broadcast, it was suggested that it should be made accessible and affordable to all Nigerians. And it was suggested that broadcasting, with its unique features of audio-visual be repositioned as a tool for national integration by serving to preserve and promote the nation's cultural values. Several others suggestions to revamp other relevant sectors such as film, advertising and public relations were offered. Like the case with many other national policy and programmes in Nigeria, another major challenge to National communication policy and strategy is lack of implementation. For almost a decade, the suggestions above in the 2004 review document were merely on papers, as nothing substantive was done to change the status quo. Rather, the document according Johnson & Alao (2013) and Akinfeleye (2017, p.142) was being continuously edited by different in-house teams in the ministry of information and communication. Several aspects in the older draft were redrafted on a number of grounds.

Notably, two major issues were raised: first, to put the draft document in a shape in which it can transform the national psyche and self-perception of Nigerians via fostering participatory democracy and governance as well as economic prosperity. The second was to place communication at the heart of the envisaged transformation process so that interactions within people, families, and communities as well as across social and cultural levels would be premised on dialogue.

In 2013, another confusion set in as the government demerged the ministry into two entities-one for communication and the other for information. Iredia (2017) maintains that government in a bit to make Nigeria a communicating nation came up with a National Information Policy for Nigeria. The retreat organized by the Ministry in calabar 2011, canvassed effective communication for development. This retreat only changed or replaced 'communication' in the former document with 'information". This event reflect a myopic understanding of the concept of

communication by participants of the retreat and the dualism of a caricature in which title and heading reflect information while body of text is showing communication.

In the same vein, the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) organised another seminar in Kuru, Jos from October 16th to 19th, 2016 with a theme "Towards a Comprehensive National Communication Policy and Strategy," where participants observed that National Information and communication management has been problematic in Nigerian, in spite of the efforts that have been made by previous government. Participants also noted that the designs and implementation of those plans have been inadequate and some have failed to pay attention to the need for an all- inclusive policy formulation.

Apart from noting that the substantial growth and diversity of the country has not been reflected in the communication policies of Nigeria, stakeholders at the 2016 conference stressed that government policies, are not sufficiently responding to the communication rights and needs of majority of Nigerians living in the rural areas.

The 2016 conference articulates nine(9) declaration which include the need for Nation communication policy and strategy should reflect the constitution, national core values and align extant and relevant policies; (Galadima and Adeyanju 2017).

Major considerations towards robotic National Communication Policy and Strategy in Nigerian from 1999-2018.

With the returned of democratic rule in 1999 to date, a number of national communication policies were introduced. The table below presents policies that were reviewed in order to strengthen National communication policy and strategy in Nigeria.

Pitfall Analysis of the Table

A diagnostic review of the table above shows that efforts have been on for many years to put together comprehensive and up-to- data National communication policy and strategy document that will be acceptable to all stakeholders. However, the effort above has not yielded the right result needed, thereby leaving the field of communication

and information management in Nigeria open to all sorts of interpretation and abuse. To this end, Adeyanju (2017, p.6) lamented that “it has left the terrain largely uncoordinated”.

A critical look at the table above shows that while there are policies for different aspects

of Nigerian national communication, there is no up-to-date comprehensive communication and strategy document to draw from. It is worthy of note that some countries, including certain emerging economies are properly coordinated, and are studying what they refer to as the post

Nigeria’s National Communication Policies and Objectives from 1999 to 2018

Year	Policies	Major Objectives of the review
2004	Review of mass communication policy	To revamp broadcasting by liberalization, accessibility and pluralism of broadcasting.
2002	Licensing of campus Radio Broadcasting	Further liberalization of liberalization access to students and universities communities.
2006	Communication Radio policy	Increase access, participation and ownership through free licensing.
2009	Committee on Digitization of broadcasting	To migrate from analogue to digital broadcast platform.
2009	The media and communication thematic group	To establish comprehensive policy and legal reforms in all types of media and providing state of the art equipment in all media organizations.
2011	Enactment of freedom of information Act (FOI)	Making public records and information more freely available and access.
2013	National information policy	Put in place National information policy guided by to participatory, equity, freedom, pluralism as well as protection, promotion and integrated coherence system.
2015	Release of community radio	To approve the community who broadcasts license.
2016	Towards a comprehensive National communication policy and strategy	To find policy solutions and strategies to the nation’s communication problems.

Source: Data *obtain from NIPSS and repackage by the Authors*

In this computer age, there are no extant and formal policies in use in Nigeria, nor is there a know functional agency besides, perhaps, the regulators in the communication and information sector.

Also contentious in the table above is that the draft document analysed was silence on the fact that media content, which are supposedly designed to inform educate and entertain the people are, not understood by them. Thus, there exists in Nigeria, a visible disconnect between the government and the people and also between the media and a large percentage of their target audiences. Unfortunate for Nigerians, most of the challenges the country is passing through are carry over's from the 20th century. These include but not limited to: ownership/control, regulatory structure, funding and sustainability, poor management, lack of training, issue of access to communication as well as lack of systematic approach in analysis and poor implementation.

Conclusion

This paper examines the status of National communication policy and strategy in Nigeria from 1999 to 2018 and found that there is apparent disconnect between the government and the people, as communication between the two is occasioned by inaccurate or inadequate communication. At present, the Nigeria's national policy document on communication is at the draft stage and proper implementation has been a herculean task.

Contemporary, the National Communication Policy and Strategy in Nigeria is unharmonized, instead of the policies acting as mediating factors in national development; they have largely hindered sustainable developments. If public policy is for the benefit of the people, they should be part of the formulation and implementation of every policy, but they are not in the case of Nigeria.

Recommendations

After a holistic review of relevant literature on Nigeria's National communication

policies and strategies from 1999 -2018, this paper suggests that rather than having subsectors policies scattered in several document, the system approach should be use by the government to attain an integrative and properly coordinated National communication policy and strategy with emphasis on implementation to address the challenges observed in previous policy draft, so as to make Nigeria a communicating nation.

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