Theorizing Development And Sustainability Vis-À-Vis Development Media Theory

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Abstract

This paper seeks to review the **"Development Media Theory"** and to espouse seminal contributions in different literature, with a view to understanding the theory in terms of its approach to sustainability and national development. Within the context of the foregoing, the concerns are that while this theory holds great significance to the understanding of development having to do with the process of unfolding the potentials of a given reality as admitted in many areas of its scholarship, there is the tendency towards creating a mosaic of ideas in its applications by scholars, which is quite unsettling. Even how the people that create meanings out of the theory relate to the realities on ground especially in developing societies may be where understanding of this theory's tenets is required. Given that the theory is our tool, the argument is how it has helped in shaping aspects of development since its adoption several decades ago. The paper's interest, therefore, is to stimulate discussion around how to make the theory sellable, more visible, specific and pertinent in all spheres of research especially in the humanities in ways that can foster political, economic and socio-cultural development in real terms.

Keywords: Theory, Development, Culture, Media, Sustainability.

Introduction

With the enthusiastic acceptance of the works of development theorists following studies on the role of the media in national development at the turn of the twentieth century, 'the development media theory', has largely remained one of the dominant theories, if not the most important of the age in terms of socio-political and institutional relevance. Even as the snags of applying the theory persists as studies on negative effect of mass media does suggest, it seems

the flurry of literature as Giddens (1991) opines, have shifted from critiquing the theory, to proffering alternatives as a realistic theoretical construct.

Thus, the exigent call for the delivery of development ingredients especially in developing societies which has become a sad rehearse of human failing can only bear repeating here. Whether or not the carcass of the theory needs to be exhumed for a proper forensic analysis, it remains to be said if it is the inextricable reliance on this model of development emerging from what Noura Quebral a scholar from the Philippines and pioneer of development journalism in the country calls "the delivery of useful social and economic information to developing masses" that it is.

Quebral(1973,p.25) defines development journalism as:

> the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater equity and the larger fulfilment of the human potential.

Other than of the acquisition, establishment and control of mass media, the contending views on development has not changed from relaying of information that could be useful for daily activities and decision making. Since the pursuit of economic opulence is left to whatever value the society considers, it is the material wellbeing of the citizenry especially in developing societies which remains largely pedestrian that this theory's application is focused on and its research enquiries.

Why Walter Rodney's book How Europe Underdeveloped Africa continues to be seen as a socially responsible view is because it departs from this mosaic of Western ideas and rightly, it is part of what has shaped and influenced the understanding of many scholars and researchers in the field of development. By this broad definition Rodney meant;

> increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, self-discipline, creativity, responsibility and material wellbeing. Some of these are virtually moral categories which are difficult to evaluate but indisputably, the achievement of any of these aspects is very much tied with the state of society as a whole (Sen, 1996; Okoye, 1992, p.17).

The real question now is: how far did the contrasting perspective of development go in explaining the differences in values of developing societies? As catalysts for leap-flogging development, has communication really been a quantifiable prerequisite? Again, even when the prerequisites are available, such as in the case of Nigeria, some unquantifiable catalysts to start off and sustain the developmental process might still be absent and all of these are sometimes not taken into account when innovations fail to materialize. Tiamiyu (2003) shines some light on this issue of development process;

> that the process of development is not easily kick-
> started. More so, like in some sectors where economic
> growth in terms of increased output has been recorded,
> there could not have been accompanying socio-
> economic transformation and development as
> improvement in the well-being of citizens which is the
> ultimate

By calling for this review, this study has set out to expose contributions made in different aspects, with a view to critiquing the theory as previously alluded to and in doing so, this researcher is not unmindful of the varieties of cues from political, economic and socio-cultural studies on the theory and how the media and people that create meanings out of these realities see them. In all, the understanding of development media theory would have been expanded at the end of the discourse.

Professor Nora Cruz Quebral's paper at a symposium on the theme "In Search of Breakthrough in Agricultural Development held in honour of Dr. Dioscorol Umali (December 9-10, 1973). Quibral's department was renamed Dept of Development Communication following year. (See Journalsage pub.doiwww-researchgatenet, publication,Asia).

The Theory as a Crab Dictator

Theories generally provide explanations for understanding a phenomenon. They are largely what can be described as given logical explanations of realities. Theories are often cited for the purpose of making predictions align with research (See p.93). The problematic nature of enquiries demands that application of theoretical concepts in a study or its aspect be made in order to make sense of contributions to knowledge irrespective of their diversities. Ekeanyanwu(2012), citing Kerlinger, (1973) defines a theory as:

> a statement that presents a systematic view of a phenomenon
> and specifies the relationship among the concepts for better
> understanding and focus on current analysis that shows the
> existence of possibilities which the present effort holds.

In his book Introduction to Research Methodology, Osuala(1993, p.15), lays further credence to the theory by stating some of its purposes such as: synthesizing isolated bits of data, deepening understanding through deductions of various degrees, basis upon which theory becomes a more readily adaptable form; and making predictions of occurrence of phenomenon observable and sellable. However, within the context of the foregoing, the theory has remained one subject of intense debate as a result of diversities of views. But irrespective of how much puncture this has done to deflate the relevance of the theory, it continues to be admitted in many areas of scholarship and there is the tendency in social sciences that it will continually become undeniable benchmarks(Wood, 1983; Wood, 1985).

Thus, to further the spheres of our burgeoning enquiry, many social scientists have tried to underscore how the mass media uses one aspect of theory or another through exploring

differences in environment of communication. This makes it possible to address some of the problems making it difficult to articulate as it were. Given the role of the theory above, the discussion of this theory becomes quite compelling and imperative.

Methodology

The study adopted the 'discourse analysis' method which was applied in synthesising various opinions from a motley crew of scholars/ researchers whose contributions was used. Discourse analysis or analytical approach draws largely from literature on the subject matter from books, journals, and academic reports. The investigator's observations of changing dynamics of the current age proved quite invaluable.

Development Media Theory: Back- grounding

This theory did not initially come from any particular school but arose out of the concern to describe and prescribe the norms of journalism practice in the developing world as the earlier four normative theories of the press: authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility and soviet-communist, had limited application and benefit to the countries. The normative element of this emerging development theory was specifically at variance with dependency and foreign domination. McQuail avers that there were positive uses of the media in national development, especially in spheres of cultural identity of particular nations and societies (McQuail, 1987, p.120).

Arising, therefore, the fundamental purpose of this theory, according to Okunna (1999) is to "use the media to serve the general good of the nation by making them function as government instruments for achieving economic growth, political stability, national sovereignty and cultural development". This is why it is peculiar to developing countries, where there are urgent needs to achieve all these goals and where the felt needs are also stronger. She maintains that economic development and nation building should take precedence over every other aspect; including the freedom of the press and the individuals and that the mass media should assist the government to achieve these ends.

It was further stated by McQuail that because of the variety of economic and political conditions and the changing nature of institutions in developing countries, prescriptions appropriate to their situations is not easy to make. He identifies some conditions that limit the potential benefits of the mass media to include: infrastructure, professional skills, and production of cultural resources. McQuail lists the main principles of the theory thus:

- Media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established standards
- Freedom of the media should be open to restriction, according to economic priorities and development needs of society
- Media should give priority in their contents to national language and culture
- Priority should be given in news and information to links with other developing countries, which are close geographically or politically. Journalists and other media

workers have responsibilities as well as freedom in their information-gathering and dissemination tasks.

- The principle also recognizes the interests of the state in the right to intervene in, or restrict media operations through devices as censorship, subsidy, and direct control. It is essentially the responsibility of the press to encourage grassroots participation in development programmes especially the state-owned media.

McQuail and scholars like him deserve credit, for their penetrating insight into what appears to be the common line of thinking among leaders of developing countries and much so with the emphasis of the society shifting towards the values of horizontal rather than vertical (top-down) communication (McQuail, 2006).

Perception of Governance and Development Media Theory

Perception is a process through which the five sensory organs in humans gets information from the brain and process such information as a basis to form opinion or take action (Hamilton, 2009, p.27). Governance is also the process by which society seeks to actualise its goals by giving attention to various concerns. Governance sometimes is viewed narrowly in terms of how a constituted government exercise its statutory power and authority. Such a perception, however, ignores the important role that the citizenry must play in setting the goal. The citizens must be the pivot and focus of development hence; they must control the direction of governance. Thus, governance enables interests, vision and resources to come together in harmony. Good governance demands effective system for effective intra - and inter - stakeholder communication, making the attainment of objectives easy. In terms of setting the tempo and direction of socio-economic opportunities, prerequisites enumerated by the (United Nations, 1999), cited by Aboyade, (2000, p.12) has it that:

> citizens clamour for good governance, Udeze (2016) implying that governance can be good or bad; good governance seeks and ensures a growing and peaceful polity in which everyone participates effectively and shares equality in the responsibilities and benefits of the social peace, growth and development. The media ensures that all stakeholders, pressure groups, professional, occupational trade and consumer associations, community and cultural associations, political parties, businesses, including other countries participate. If the goals are not set, the clamour can only be wishful thinking.

Although all stake holders must contribute towards achieving good governance, government has a crucial role to play through its control and exercise of political power. It is the responsibility of government to facilitate enabling environment for effective participation through policy management. With this, substantial proportion of national economic resources realized through taxation or direct exploitation of national resources would be harnessed for poverty alleviation through job creation and basic services that can empower citizens to participate actively in the development process. The Greeks were confronted by the reality of

change and they took some steps quite instructive at a stage. They were the first in history to make a science out of the study of change. The Greek word 'physics' which means 'development' was applied metaphorically to all things as an essential element in this classical view. Thus, the state evolved as a cyclical pattern in growth and civilization. The optimism that was provoked by this enlightenment, culminated in the progress made by the turn of the 19th century (Ohikhokhai, 2002). However, participatory governance requires enlightened citizenry, through mass literacy and education, mass economic empowerment, mass communication, and mass mobilization.

Link between Society and Media Theory

Even though we have alluded to how development principles can aid the attainment of developmental objectives, it has not been the case for Nigeria over the last six decades for many reasons; the ordinary people or the grassroots cannot find this synergy. The grassroots are not involved in how the country is governed despite that they constitute the bulk of the electorate. They are also disenfranchised in the electoral process and neglected. A recent case in point was the build up to the 2023 election (still being contested at the Tribunal). Despite the lessons learnt from the mistakes of the last two election seasons it still turned out to be the hugest charade so far where the will of the majority is being subverted so brazenly by an elite class whose aversion for transparency and tranquillity has become legendry. While the Nigerian people await the outcome of the court verdict, the impact of this impunity on development remains to be said.

Unlike what obtains in United States of America and Britain where democratic practices have gained some level of general acceptability, where opinion polls precede actual elections and candidates seeking office are made to articulate programmes and policy thrust of what they have for the people, what obtains in Nigeria is neither a reflection of the present state of the nation's sophistication nor her laggard status. The Nigerian electorate lack the necessary value orientation. Afilaka (2008, p.36), says that;

> starting from the electoral process marred by faulty start, improperly articulated electoral plans, political insecurity, weak political institutions, shallow sense of nationhood, extreme economic dependence, and abuse of power by political leadership, it is not, therefore, surprising that under a system that has turned the political space against opposing ideas, there is little or nothing to offer to the people as development.

Some of the criticisms against the media have to do with imbalance in the structure and distribution of mass media and its reportage that tends to be unidirectional. This means that message flow from the government to the people is one way. The question is whether they are doing so much but so little reflects as contents on the pages of newspapers or broadcast news? The question to ask is 'what is happening in the rural areas?' The contentions here underline the emphasis the media should place on development contents as important index for ascertaining socio-economic and political development. While doing well to stress the

importance of the media in ensuring development, the media seems to keep a blind eye to political misgivings and policy summersaults of government, that have resulted in poor governance and un-sustained development.

Rural Development

In Nigeria, rural development has undergone many stages since (1987). There are four recognizable stages namely:

(1) When agriculture per se was considered as synonymous with rural development;

(2) Partial recognition stage, when Development Authorities were introduced;

(3) Further awareness through the introduction of agricultural projects;

(4) Full awareness through the establishment of Directorate of Food and Rural Development; (WHO)

Four patterns have been equally recognized by Williams, (1978) to include:

1.   sector approaches;

2.   coordinated approaches;

3.   participatory approaches; and

4.   multiple-purpose programmes.

He noted that Nigeria has experimented with all of them. The first was "Green Revolution". Next was "Back to Land" and Operation Feed the nation. To feed the nation, an integrated approach at Rural Development was enunciated under "Development Authorities" and it should be noted that the most recent has been "Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure."

Apart from these, financial allocation to agriculture increased steadily from 5% in the First Development plan to 11.86% in the Fourth Development Plan. (Adeyemo, 1987) Impressive as this seems, the imbalance between the rural and urban areas still persist. While acknowledging this fact Onibokun (2009, p.13) nevertheless, had cause to note that:

> when the condition in the rural areas are compared with those in the urban areas, it is very clear that government's development policies and programme has issues at the implementation stage, … not only does it favour the urban areas, from available data it has not trickled down as desired. Social and institutional infrastructure indicate general gross inadequacy of rural infrastructure and also gross spiral imbalance and regional disparities in distribution of the available infrastructure.

A number of factors have accounted for the condition of rural development and it might be important to go back to the outline provided by Williams (1978), when he said that the rural man has been largely misunderstood in the past. The rural man has been painted in lurid colours. Much attention has not been paid to him, not to talk of understanding him. It is surprising that whereas government expends so much energy and resources in trying to improve the rural areas, the rural man whose life is likely to be affected by the advocated changes remain largely unrecognized.

Omoye (2010, p.27) made this view when he cited an example of farmers in the defunct Nigerian Institute for Oil Palm Research (NIFOR), Benin-city, in the then Mid-Western Region that he said were

> quite receptive of the technological change in oil-palm farming, when the institute was established. But because they were initially not allowed access to the improved palm nuts cultivated, (Staff of the institute were officially forbidden from eating the fruits not to mention farming on their own) they became apathetic and discouraged.

A few years later, the Malaysian government took some of the seedlings from NIFOR, and distributed them free to their farmers. This approach was what encouraged their farmers and today palm produce is the main stay of the Malaysian economy. Aboyade (1999) also noted that the apathy exhibited by rural population account for the apparent difficulty in mobilizing them to participate in development efforts and this he said, is explained by past disappointments. In a pilot study she noted that rural library service project suffered similar fate, recalling a catalogue of unfulfilled promise made by one government after another and therefore, exhibited 'undisguised cynicism' each time they receive new government plans for their location.

But contrary to the view that the rural man is an ignorant person interested only in tradition, Aboyade (1999) found villages that are rather inquisitive. They asked questions on topics ranging from health matters through social amenities to economic and political issues; they sought to know how they might improve farm yields but also wanted to know other possibilities for employment outside agriculture. They also displayed unexpected interest in newspaper contents.

What this means is that the rural population, though anxious to improve their lot, seem to have lost faith in government functionaries because of lies. Aboyade (1999), reflecting on the needs of rural communities and their apathy over whatever government is involved in, said that such would not be in the overall interest of development. Government should study the attitude of the rural people in order to reshape the approach in dealing with them especially in these days of internet.

Leveraging on Development Media Theory in Nigeria

Nigeria of today is a good example of some African countries that has become notorious in not embracing responsibility of calling attention to any accurate reading of their nation. Many Nigerians see themselves as trapped in a sort of Bermuda triangle, (like the North Atlantic Ocean experience where over 50 ships and airplanes were said to have mysteriously disappeared with cargos of lofty aspirations); innovation failure as a result of poor leadership in virtually every sector of the nations' life, is why (Aboyade (1999), says that:

> despite the impressive array of radio and television stations as well as its rich staple of newspapers and magazines, together with several departments and schools of communication and corps of journalists, Nigeria's record of innovation is anything but impressive.

As Oso(1990,p.23) has also rightly observed that the system of power and control of the mass media, hold the turf of innovation often at variance with the ideology of the development media theorists. Oso(1990) maintains that the media in Nigeria have a long history of credibility issues, having been used almost on a sustained basis for mass deceit and propaganda by the politicians and the military in government. The media are regarded as the mouthpiece of the power elite and are subjected to such fluidity as would make broadcast operations such a sickening nightmare.

Another one is that the ways this has been perpetuated by governments is by not paying attention to basic demands of new broadcast equipment, giving rise to many obsolete ones in use, and making them pay more attention to personalities rather than issues. News commercialization and urban-oriented coverage of news have sustained sidelining of development activities in the rural areas. Thus, concerned by all these, not even an incurable optimist can argue that holistic national development is possible. It appears development is already a mirage without an agenda for the nation. It means that the Development media theory has been reduced to mere academic exercise, if it cannot tackle all the challenges above.

What then are the challenges?

- Development media theorists are not taken seriously by government
- No multidirectional flow of information, one that can promote dialogue and sharing of thought
- Lack of training for promotion of social and economic values of the theory
- Need for theory to be demonstrative both in treatment and illustration
- No right language for better expression and comprehension, etc (Udeze ,2016)

In terms of mounting sufficient pressure to ensure the enthronement of probity in public office, the performance of the media falls short of acceptable standard as if they were not the same set of people who fought the military to relinquish their hold on political power. The circumstances of real world situations, call for institutional framework that can ensure a virile policy upon which sustainable development may be realized. To advance the system, the press must ensure that the system is open and transparent, devoid of any form of manipulation and

there should not be conditions in which the rules are bent in favour of one against the other. (Akinfeleye, 1995)

As a reference point, Omojola (2010, p.19) has made an implicit statement about what a true African development communication reading must represent, when he says that such must be marked by the philosophy in the following conceptual planks:

1. Raise consciousness by providing contents that will encourage and strengthen people's minds to participate in development efforts

2. Enlighten participants, readers to clear doubts

3. Point to where negative conditions exist in order to bring about better understanding and eliminate negative perception

4. Deal in a positive manner with issues according to existing conditions, be frank and sincere.

5. Build confidence through socio-economic and political institutions/platforms to encourage willing participation

6. Foster education and social change.

According to Dudley (1989,p.133), societies do not evolve from the blues, societies proceed from the tensions/contradictions built into its social space - economic, political, social, ethnic, ideological, et cetera. Development can either be undermined or increased by these tensions.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages we have examined a good number of issues bordering on the theory above and how its tenet applies to sustainable development and found that the absence of .probity in public office and poor performance of the media have been a major challenge. We equally elucidated to the fact that institutional framework for development need to be in place to ensure a virile policy upon which sustainable development may be realized. If the media on whose ambit the ideals of this theory rests, falls short of acceptable standard, development would certainly be undermined.

Much more so, where some of the fine ideas of democracy are subjected to abuses or profoundly tainted by circumstances of political expediency, that call for rethinking the theory. The paper believes that with the vast resources in Nigeria, it could have been possible to leverage on the burgeoning by setting the tempo and direction of socio-economic opportunities and attainment of objectives set by this theory. Sadly, this, as well as the prerequisite enumerated by (United Nations, 1999) has become a mirage. It also expects the media to reverse this trend for the benefits of social peace, growth and development.

It contended that in order for this to happen, the media must ensures that all stakeholders, pressure groups, professional, occupational trade and consumer associations, community and

cultural associations, political parties, businesses, including other countries as allies have to participate in the rebuilding process. The media must set the agenda and set the goals to be attained. Good governance also has a crucial role to play. Conclusively, there must be enabling environment that can facilitate this process.

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