

Ruralites sources of information about changes in south-western Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the sources of information used by the rural inhabitants of South-western Nigeria to learn about the different changes introduced by the military regimes. The underlying assumption is that the different types of information sources available to the rural population have varying effectiveness in communicating different changes. The data used were gathered from secondary sources as well as from randomly selected four hundred household heads using interview schedules. Our analyses reveal that -

- 1) The non-discriminatory changes affected the ruralites more than the discriminatory changes;
- 2) More respondents learnt of the non-discriminatory changes than they did of the discriminatory ones;
- 3) More respondents supplemented their first hand knowledge of the non-discriminatory changes with information from other sources;
- 4) Radio was the most used channel of information to learn about changes in general; and
- 5) The hypothesis that different sources of information have varying influences in communicating different changes is sustained.

INTRODUCTION

Within the last one decade, Nigeria has undergone a series of socio-economic, infrastructural and political changes in very quick successions. The leadership and philosophy of government have changed, at least, four times and innumerable number of far-reaching policy decisions have been taken and implemented. In fact, it could be claimed, without any fear of contradiction that the post-civil war Nigeria has undergone more changes per year than the pre-military Nigeria underwent in her six years of post-independent development. And change, in any form affects a wide range of individual and functional aspects of the societies to which it is directed, consequently causing a disequilibrium in the eco-system. Accord-

ing to Nelson, Ramsey and Verner (1960), "almost any kind of change produces problems if for no other reason than that it represents a deviation from that to which one is accustomed".

Changes brought about in a military regime may have unforeseen effects. This is because a military rule in any nation is not bound by well known and accepted conventions and procedures of elected government. This unique but strange situation is usually associated with tension among the people, a phenomenon which underlines the ubiquitousness of conflict. Such conflict abounds not only because the military is not a democratically elected government of the people, but also because its methods of bringing about changes traditionally involves coercion, speed and precision, thereby giving the individuals in the target system very little time to evaluate and internalise the desired change. This can have very serious repercussions, particularly on the rural inhabitants, unless the changes are adequately managed. The rural people naturally live far away from the seat of government which are also, in most cases, the centre for dissemination of changes. This makes them more susceptible to distorted information and consequent mal-adjustments.

One aspect of the management of changes is the sources through which they are disseminated. And because of the unique characteristics of socio-economic, physico-structural and political changes, different channels of communication may become more effective in bringing about the desired change of reaching the desired target than others. Furthermore, because of the differences in the changes, the generalizations which are valid for one type may not hold for another (Nelson, Ramsey and Verner, 1960). Hitherto, both the Nigerian governments and social scientists have taken for granted the ultimate effectiveness of various channels of communication available in communicating the changes introduced by government to the people, particularly those in the rural area. Hence, limited effort (Dare, 1974 and Dare, 1975) has been made to evaluate these changes and relate them to the most effective sources of information through which they have been channelled. This study is therefore directed at identifying the major sources through which rural Nigerians learn about the various types of changes introduced within the period of military rule. More specifically, the objectives of the study are:

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1. To identify the channels of communication through which rural people in South-western Nigeria learnt about the changes taking place in the country from 1966 to 1977; and
2. To determine whether there is any relationship between specific social changes and channels of communication.

As would be shown in the section that follows, all the studies done in the area of communication of innovation both within and outside Nigeria have been concerned mainly with agricultural innovations. However, circumstances in the contemporary Nigerian society have exposed rural people not only to changes in agricultural practices but also in other spheres of the societal life including politics, physical infrastructures and education. More importantly, these rapid changes in the past decade, have taken place under non-democratic conditions which the classical diffusion and adoption theories assume or take for granted. It therefore becomes necessary to reconsider the effectiveness of official sources of information about these changes. This type of study is useful not only to policy makers and implementors, but might also help in the formulation of some strategy for effecting social change which will simultaneously enable the target system to adjust smoothly to such changes. The comparison of the applicability or otherwise of the classical theories of social change under democratic conditions and changes under a regimented condition will also extend the frontiers of knowledge in this field.

Literature review

Only a few studies have been done on sources of information of socio-economic, physico-structural and political changes in Nigeria. Prominent among these is the study done by Williams (1969) on improved farm practices. He discovered that the official change agent, radio/rediffusion and fellow farmers were the most important sources of information about new farm practices. He therefore recommended personal contact as an important means of communication with farmers. Clark and Akinbode (1968) had earlier identified both mass media and inter-personal sources of information as channels through which rural people obtained essential information. Other studies by Yazidu (1973) and Efionayi (1973) done in different parts of Nigeria confirmed these earlier findings.

The significance of mass media in disseminating social change has also been emphasized by Rogers (1969). So important was considered mass media information that in 1962 UNESCO set up an "immediate target" which every country should aim at providing for each one hundred of its inhabitants. These are: ten copies of paper, five radio receivers, two cinema sets and two television sets (Schramm, 1964).

The relative effectiveness of different sources of information in the adoption process has also been investigated by various researchers. Such investigations reveal that the process of acceptance of new ideas is seldom a unit act. Rather, it is a process composed of a number of definable stages, ranging from awareness to complete and full incorporation of the new idea into a larger system of behaviour. For the purpose of determining the most effective source of information for transmitting change policies, Bertrand (1958) gave the following guidelines:

1. Information transmitted through personal contact tends to be more effective than those transmitted through impersonal media.
2. Dependence upon sources of information outside the immediate locality is more likely to result in the acceptance of social and technological changes than dependence upon neighbours.
3. The greater the number of sources of information used, the greater the likelihood of the target system accepting the changes introduced. In other words, use of several sources of information ensures more complete knowledge about the changes concerned, and
4. Communication, in general is effective in so far as it is oriented to the interest and needs of the target system. This means that the cultures of the target of any information as well as the credibility of the source are major factors to be taken into consideration.

This study is therefore designed on the premise that the different types of information sources available to the rural population in the areas studied have varying effectiveness in communicating different changes introduced by Nigerian Military Government within the last one decade.

Methodology and sources of data

Information on a sample of the major changes which the various military regimes have brought about in the country since 1966 were obtained through a review of official documents, newspapers and other available literature. These changes were then classified under five broad categories including social, political, economic and physico-structural changes, in addition to a 'mixed' category in which items cut across all others.

The social changes were those in educational policies including the launching of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme, and the establishment of new Universities. Political changes included the military coup d'etat, drafting of new constitution, local government reforms, and the creation of states.

Economic changes included the Udoji Salary Award to the public sectors, Operation Feed the National programme (OFN), Group Farming, and change in currency from pounds and shillings to naira and kobo. Another economic change which occurred during this period was the fluctuations in the prices of agricultural products. The latter was not a change introduced by the military government but became a very serious issue during the military regime to the extent that the Gowon administration in 1974 decided to take over the responsibility of fixing the prices paid by the Marketing Boards to farmers (*West Africa*, April 8, 1974).

The physico-structural changes were the construction of new roads and the change from left to right hand drive. Items which were classified under the 'mixed' category included the retirement exercise and the 'clean-up campaign' of the public service, campaign against wasteful spending and the introduction of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme for University Graduates.

For purpose of analysis the changes included in this study were further classified as 'discriminatory' and 'non-discriminatory'. The former included such changes as Udoji Salary Award, retirement exercise, group farming and the N.Y.S.C. programme; These are changes which do not directly affect every member of the target society. Others earlier mentioned were considered non-discriminatory in the sense that they have direct effect on every member of the society to which it is directed.

In addition to the preliminary information collected from newspapers and written documents, and for executing the major objectives of the study, four hundred respondents were randomly drawn from twenty-two rural communities located in six administrative divisions of the former Western State of Nigeria (Ile-Ife, Ilesa, Ijebu-Ode, Osun Central (Osogbo), Ondo and Akure) so as to cut across the three new states (Ogun, Oyo and Ondo) which have been created in this area. The sampling was done by choosing every other, fourth or fifth (depending on the population) household for interviewing. There was no case of refusal but in cases where the head of household could not be located after three repeat calls, the next household was substituted. The twenty-two communities were purposively selected, using a map, and the number of selected respondents per community varied proportionately from seven to twenty depending on the estimated population of each community.

Respondents were mainly heads of households and were predominantly males (89%) with average age of 48 years, and therefore were old enough to have lived and witnessed the various changes in the country within the last ten years. The majority of the respondents (56.75%) were illiterates in English language.

Pre-tested interview schedules were used for data collection which took place between July and December 1976. Because of the exploratory nature of the study, the level of statistical analysis used has been limited to simple descriptive and chi-square analyses.

Findings

A. Impact of Changes on the Ruralites

The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they were affected by the various changes which have taken place in the country over the past decade. They were to indicate whether these changes affected them directly, indirectly or not at all. Table 1 shows the range of responses to this question.

The weighted mean score calculated indicates that most of the respondents were more directly affected by the change to New Currency, Universal Primary Education Scheme (UPE) and the Operation Feed the Nation Campaign (OFN). These were closely followed by the change from left to right hand drive and the creation

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TABLE 1: IMPACT OF CHANGES ON RESPONDENTS

Types of change	All Respondents						Weighted mean score 'Score'
	Directly affected		Indirectly affected		Not affected		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Military coup	47	11.75	48	12	305	76.25	1.36
Civil war	44	11.00	83	20.75	273	68.25	1.43
Mass recruitment into Army	41	10.25	67	16.75	292	73.00	1.37
Udoji Award	89	22.25	99	24.75	212	53.00	1.69
Change of currency	200	50.00	114	28.5	86	21.50	2.86
Change from left to right-hand drive	123	30.75	128	32.00	149	37.25	1.94
O F N	172	43.00	68	17.00	160	40.00	2.03
Oil boom	47	11.75	81	20.25	272	68.00	1.44
Falling Agric. prices	118	29.50	82	20.50	200	50.00	1.80
U P E							
Drafting of New Constitution	20	5.00	57	14.25	323	80.75	1.24
Return to Civil Rule	36	9.00	34	8.50	330	82.50	1.27
Retirement Exercise	36	9.00	25	6.25	339	84.75	1.24
Group Farming	152	38.00	27	6.75	221	55.25	1.83
Anti-Wasteful Spending Campaign	80	20.00	64	16.00	256	64.00	1.56
N. Y. S. C.	80	20	34	8.50	286	71.50	1.49
L. G. Reform	53	13.25	76	19.00	271	67.75	1.46
Creation of States	131	32.75	103	25.75	166	29.00	1.90

of states. A close analysis of these changes which had a weighted mean score of 2 and above will reveal that these were mainly the non-discriminatory types of change (i.e. those whose effects were expected to permeate all sectors of society). Such changes stand in utter contrast to things like the retirement exercise in the public service, and drafting of new constitution, the effects of which were limited to the elites in the upper sectors of the society. Thus, at this stage we may conclude that the ruralites' level of awareness of changes in the society and perception of the effects of such changes, are dependent not on whether the change is political, economic or socio-

physical in nature, but upon whether the change is discriminatory (i.e. affects certain while it excludes other segments of a society) or non-discriminatory (i.e. affects everyone irrespective of class) in nature.

B. Sources of Information Used by Ruralites to learn about Changes

The main hypothesis which underlies the analysis carried out in this section is that there is no relationship between the nature of changes (i.e. whether political, economic, social, physico-structural and mixed) and the source of information most used by ruralites to learn about the changes.

The chi-square analysis was computed to test this hypothesis. The hypothesis of no relationship between sources of information and types of change was rejected as the chi-square value of 51.2(df=20) is significant at .001 level with contingency coefficient of 0.34. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2.

To further investigate this relationship, the rates of unawareness and reliance on other sources of information were computed for the various changes grouped into three categories as shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3: RATE OF UNAWARENESS OF CHANGE AND RELIANCE ON OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Category of change	Rate of unawareness	Rate of reliance on other sources of Information
Political	37.7%	51.0%
Economic	15.0%	35.0%
Socio-Physical	2.0%	14.0%

The data reported in this table are the cumulative percentage for each change per category and show that more people get to learn of socio-physical than political changes. This finding is explained by the non-discriminatory nature of socio-physical changes, such as change from left to right hand drive. However, apart from learning about changes from external sources, individuals may learn about them first-hand before supplementing their own knowledge with information from other sources. This supplementary hypothesis was investigated by determining the respondents' rate of reliance on other sources of information for the three categories of change. These data are also reported in Table 3. The data reveal that 51 percent, 35 percent and 14 percent of the respondents relied on sources of information other than themselves to learn about political, economic and socio-physical changes respectively. This finding may also have to do with the non-discriminatory nature of most socio-physical changes.

C. Sources of Information most Used

Although we have established that different sources of information have varying influences in communicating different changes, policy recommendations

can still not be made unless the analysis is carried further to determine the sources of information that were most used to learn about changes in general and also for specific changes. The section that follows contains the findings on this.

The analyses reveal that radio was the single most used channel of information to learn about changes in general (45.9%), followed by local organisations (23.0%), rural folks (8.5%), public information service such as mobile cinema, mobile information service, etc. (5.7%), while official change agents and television were used least with 0.6% and 0.2% mentions respectively. For specific changes, the orders of frequency of use of different channels of information vary. For political changes, the sources of information most used by the respondents included newspapers (57.3%), rural folks (54.5%), radio (51.8%), etc., while local elites (38.2%) and official change agents became the most used sources of information (75.0%), followed by local elites (58.2%) and friends and neighbours (47.5%). Newspapers (32.0%) and urban folks (29.3%) were the least used in this respect. For socio-physical changes the rate of use of the different sources of information was more widely spread. Urban folks and public information service were most used each with 21.1% mentions. These

TABLE 4: SOURCES OF INFORMATION MOST USED TO LEARN ABOUT CHANGES (BY PERCENTAGE)

Sources of Information	Political Changes	Economic Changes	Socio Physical Changes	All Changes
Radio	51.8	34.9	13.3	45.9
Television	50.0	33.3	16.7	0.2
Friends and Neighbours	47.5	47.5	5.0	1.4
Rural Folks	54.5	34.6	10.9	8.5
Urban Folks	49.6	29.3	21.1	4.2
Newspapers	57.3	32.0	10.7	5.2
Public Information Service	48.2	30.7	21.1	5.7
Official Change Agent	25.0	75.0	0.0	0.6
Member of the Family	49.5	41.4	9.1	3.4
Local Elites	38.2	58.2	3.6	1.9
Local Organization	51.3	34.4	14.3	23.0

were followed by television (16.7%) and local organizations (14.3%). Local elites (3.6%) and official changes agents (0.0%) were least used. See Table 4. The findings confirm those of earlier studies by Clark and Akinbode (1968), Williams (1969), Yazidu (1973) and Efionayi (1973) who respectively found that the radio was the most important channel by which ruralites obtained information about agricultural innovation. Although this study deals with a variety of changes apart from agricultural innovation, the use of radio as the main source of information still holds.

Discussion

The findings of this study on the sources of information most used to learn about various changes are congruent with those on the personal characteristics of the respondents. Since the majority of the respondents claimed ownership of radio sets, it is logical to expect them to rely on this channel of communication as their main source of information as its use does not involve any additional cost. This therefore brings to focus the need to ensure that radio transmitters are evenly distributed all over the three States covered in this study so that every citizen can pick at least, one radio station regardless of where he lives.

The differential importance of sources of information in respect of different types of changes is another unique contribution of this study. The emergence of newspapers as the most used source of information to learn about political changes is bound to surprise a casual observer when this is viewed alongside the finding that shows 56.75 percent of the respondents as illiterates in English language, the language in which most of the Nigerian national dailies are published. However, casual but purposeful observation of events in the communities where this study was done provides the explanation for the position taken by newspapers. It is a common practice for the illiterate elders to request a literate adolescent child or relative to read and interpret daily newspapers to them. This highlights the need to gear up the present effort for mass literacy and numeracy education in the country.

The official change agents emerged as the most used channel of communication in respect of economic changes. This is not surprising as information on economic matters are considered as uniquely import-

ant since this may touch on the livelihood of the respondents and that of their families. Hence information on economic changes may require careful handling to ensure that these information reach the target system undistorted. The policy implication of this finding is that efforts should be made to periodically up-grade the technical competence of all official change agents in order to maintain or improve their credibility.

The wide distribution of information about socio-physical changes among the various channels of communication is a function of the non-discriminatory nature of such changes.

It is interesting to note that there appears to be this correlation between the spread of sources of information and type of change.

From the findings of this study, there appears to be no difference in the types of channels of communication used by the military regimes to establish linkages with the people when compared with those used by civilian governments (Clark and Akinbode, 1968, Williams, 1969, Dare, 1974 and 1975). Military regimes like other forms of government need to understand the needs, feelings and aspirations of their citizens and will benefit from using as many channels of communication as are available. This point was clearly brought out by Dent (1970) when he wrote:

Where military regimes have succeeded for any length of time in establishing stable and acceptable governments, it is because they have found means (effective communication) either by themselves or in cooperation with others to fulfil these functions.

Chick (1971) goes further to explain this logic when he writes:

Effective channels (of communication) identify large numbers of people with a single process of formulating, expressing and exchanging ideas. This creates an area of shared experience and helps to build bridges across vertical divisions of tribe and horizontal divisions of incipient class which may represent disabling discontinuities within the body politic.

The more information the less the need for coercion.

Conclusion

This paper summarizes the findings of a study directed at identifying the major sources through which rural Nigerians learn about the various types of changes introduced during the period of military rule.

Information were gathered from secondary sources on various types of changes which the military regimes have introduced since 1966 and these were classified, first, on the basis of the nature of the changes - i.e. social, political, economic, physico-structural and 'mixed' categories, and secondly on the basis of the coverage of their effects on the population - i.e. discriminatory and non-discriminatory. Based on these preliminary information a set of interview schedule was prepared and tested and this was used to collect the data used for analysis from four hundred household heads who were randomly selected from the rural area in the former Western State of Nigeria.

The major findings of the study include:-

1. The non-discriminatory changes affected the ruralites more than the discriminatory changes;
2. Similarly, more respondents learnt of the non-discriminatory changes than they did of the discriminatory ones;
3. More respondents supplemented their first hand knowledge of the non-discriminatory changes with information from other sources;
4. Radio was the single most used channel of information to learn about changes in general; and
5. The hypothesis that different sources of information have varying influences in communicating different changes is sustained.

These findings have far-reaching policy implications which if pursued to their logical conclusions are capable of improving relationships between the government and the governed.

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