
COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE FOR GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

In every human society, man has evolved a system by which interaction is ensured. This system of interaction enables man to share his thought and ideas as well as exert control over the wide range of phenomenon and human actions which results into development. This system is known as communication which is attained through the medium of language. Language is so vital in human existence that there is hardly any situation or human function where language is not required. It thus follows that for any idea to be transformed into any global development, it must be sufficiently couched in human communication. This means that the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for sustaining development for the benefits of man must be communicated to him through the medium of language. This paper therefore, aims at discussing communication and language as a vehicle for global sustainable development. To achieve this, effort is made to define the key terms use in the paper and to examine the role(s) communication and language can play in sustaining development.

Key words: *Communication, language and development.*

INTRODUCTION

The essence of any society is the interaction among its members. The fundamental aspect of interaction is communication. Without communication, societies would not exist. Communication is therefore essential not only to man but to other animals as members of each group communicates among themselves. This study is however, tied down to human communication. Communication is the act of transmitting information that influences the behaviour of another organism. Cherry (1989) notes that:

The very word "communicate" means "share" and in as much as you and I are communicating at the moment, we are one not so much a union as a unity. In as much as we agree, we say that we are of "one mind" or again, that we understand "one another". This one another is the unity, a group of people, a society, a culture, I would define as people in communication.

The above statement gives us the meaning of communication. Communication is essentially a social affair. It presupposes the existence of the two or more people. Communication is concerned with the creation, transmission and utilisation of information among participants, such information constitutes the message. Unoh (1987) explains communication as "the process of mutual sharing of information, ideas, thoughts and emotions between a source and a receiver, for mutual understanding, the reduction of uncertainties or for appropriate

action". It is important to note that communication involves different elements or processes in the encoding and decoding of the message. Unoh (1987) identified seven (7) processes and goals of communication as follows:

1. The **sender**, who is the initiator of the message to be conveyed. The sender of the message is the source or encoder of the message in the communication cycle.
2. The **message** is the information, idea or feeling that is sent to the receiver. The message could be expressed through verbal or non verbal symbols via-a-vis words, gestures, facial expressions, e.t.c. The message must be properly conceived and effectively conveyed.
3. The **medium** is often referred to as the channel. It could be verbal or non verbal. The most appropriate medium for conveying information is called for in order to create the desired impact in the receiver.
4. The **receiver** or decoder of the message is also one of the participants in communication cycle. His ability to receive and interpret the symbols affects the use to which the message is put.
5. **Decoding** involves assigning meanings to or interpreting the symbols used in communication. His interpretation of the message may conform with or differ from that of the sender or initiator of the message. Mutual understanding is achieved when there is convergence of meaning, while divergence will result into communication breakdown, which shows that communication has not achieved its purpose.
6. **Feedback** is the final link in communication which helps the communicators to assess the success or failure in the transmission of the intended message. It also shows the receivers reaction to the message.
7. **Noise** refers to any factor that distorts the fidelity of the message. Noise could be in form of sound, or it could take the linguistic or psychological form. Whatever form noise manifest must be controlled in order to have a clear message.

Communication has been regarded as being equivalent to culture, language, behaviour, personal effectiveness, e.t.c. In view of this, Smith (1966) claimed that the culture of a people is reflected in their specialised form of communication such as poetry, drama and ceremonial speaking. Linguists on the other hand, equate communication with language. For this reason, they consider effective communication skills to be the sound system, the syntax and the meaning system of a language. This approach however, reflects gestures and several non linguistic aspects of communication which are sometimes more important than words in the decoding process.

Schramm (1995) explains communication as "an act of establishing contact between a sender and a receiver, with the help of a message, where the sender and receiver have some common experience which gives meaning to the message encoded by the sender and decoded by the receiver". Kincaid (1979) emphasised "mutual understanding" as the common goal of communicators. According to him, communication is a process in which two or more individuals or groups share information in order to reach a mutual understanding of

each other and of the world in which they live. Communication is divided into two categories. These are verbal and non verbal communication.

Verbal communication refers to speech which is mainly human. Speech is the act or power of speaking. It therefore refers to spoken communication. Speech is essentially language. It is the most complex and characteristically human means of communication. Human speech is learned, can convey information about external events and has a grammatical structure.

Non verbal are signs or signals used to communicate important social message. Non verbal communication include social acts such as bodily posture, gestures, head nods, facial expression, bodily contact, eye movements, appearances e.t.c. Human beings have evolved a lot of systems of communication which make their social life possible. They are known for their ability to communicate precisely and effectively. The most prominent among all the systems of communication among human beings is speech and language.

Language is a unique system of communication, distinct from any other animal communication system. It allows to convey information about objects that are remote in time and space and to combine a limited number of sounds to generate new meanings. To generate these new meanings, language draws on rules or grammar. Nanda (1984) identified three important factors that make language a unique system of communication that is distinctive from any other animal communication system. Such factors include the following:

Firstly, a limited number of sounds are combined to refer to thousand of different things and experience in human language. Again, association of these sounds and what they stand for is purely conventional in human language.

Secondly, human language is productive and efficient. This means that human can combine words and sounds to produce new meaning utterances they have never heard before. For example; *"I saw a white man at the back of the thatched house adjacent to the hotel in front of the newly constructed roundabout at the Gboko road junction."* This productive capacity of human language makes them flexible instruments for communication capable of conveying all kinds of new information.

Thirdly, human language has the ability to convey information about something not in the immediate environment. This means that human language can be used to describe things that happened in the past, will or may happen in the future, things that are abstract and exist only in the mind.

Language on the other hand, is a major cultural phenomenon in human society and therefore, an important regulator of individual consciousness and social interaction. Language is so vital in human existence that there is hardly any situation or human function where language is not required. Language as a means of communication is essential in all speech communities. Language is the facilitator of human essence. All invention and achievements

ever recorded in human existence have their roots in language as a veritable instrument of thought and an indispensable channel or tool of communication.

Language has been variously defined by different linguists and language scholars because whichever way one words the definition, it may not have captured all the characteristics of language in such a single rendition. Some of the definitions include the following: Saphir (1921) define language as "a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced vocal symbols". This definition emphasises the human nature of language. Hall (1968) explained language as "the institution where by human communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually used oral-auditory symbols." What Hall means by "institutions" is that language is a significant practice in society or culture. In other words, language to him, is a purely human institution used by a particular society as one of the superstructure of that society's culture. Language is also a system of human expression by means of words. Shirley (2008) explains language as "a system of communication by speech which is essentially affected with the tongue and the lips, or by movements such as gestures, whose meanings are known to the second party". All these definitions directly or indirectly point to the fact that language is a human medium of communication that involves the use of symbols, the choice of which is made by the speaker of a particular language.

Different forms of language have been documented. Body language, animal language, sign language are considered different language types. The form of language discussed in this work excludes the non-human type and is restricted to what is commonly termed natural or human language. Development on the other hand, is the average improvement in the life of the people to the extent that poverty, unemployment and inequality are made to steadily decline (Menegbe and Omachonu, 2008). Development as a process and as a state of mind, is the proper orientation and reorganisation of the economy and the social system in relation to income and output in such a way that there is an improvement in the general well-being of the people. Todaro (1982) defined development as the reorganisation and orientation of the entire economy and social system in addition to improvement in income and output. It typically involves radical changes in institutional, social as well as in popular activities and values. This clearly explains that development is both a physical process and a state of the mind.

Rodney (1986) describes development in human society as a many sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self discipline, responsibility and material well-being. We must however, conceive development from a given social context, that is, a given socio-political configuration. This is because development ceases to have meaning only from a collective point of view. To this regard, development is considered to be a total process of social existence. It would not be development if the improvement is partial, i.e. if it affects positively some sub-system and negatively the others. A situation where development is said to have occurred should be one which on the whole has experienced average improvement. Seer (1969) summarised

development as "any situation of development must be that in which the following are declining, i.e. poverty, unemployment, and inequality. If one or two of these central problem have been growing worse, it would be strange to call the result development, even if per-capital income has doubled. Seer's definition is important for an understanding of development because it is centered on improvement of the living condition of the people.

The undertone of development is man and society and the capacity to build and sustain the material well-being inherent in the society through a process of struggle. This process of struggle must lead to progressive advancement and improvement of the quality of desirable goods and the quality of life of the human person, who will be using the desirable goods and services in the nation, towards achieving the desired human society and the common good of all the members. Development is therefore, the average improvement in the life of the people to the extent that poverty, unemployment and inequality are made to steadily decline. As a process and as a state of mind, development is the proper orientation and reorganisation of the economy and the social system in relation to income and output in such a way that there is an improvement in the general well being of the people.

Role of Language and Communication for Sustainable Development

Language and communication perform important and doubtless role in development because the development of any society is ushered in through language. Language has potentials that can be tapped and maximised for development through adequate and proper language use. Language is employed for the communication of ideas and resolution of conflicts. It also fosters unity among the people. Urua (2003) explains that language functions in defining group identity, social cohesion and integration. It also serves as custodians of indigenous culture, wealth of wisdom and experience as well as history of the people which is tantamount to development. Egbe and Basse (2002) have the same view that language serves as a people's mark of identity, pride and oneness and that a people's language helps to preserve their cultural heritage and fosters unity among the diverse peoples of the nation which ushers in development, which cannot be achieved without unity.

Language is also very essential to economic development. This is because every activity that is of economic importance is basically carried out with the use of language. In all human communities, buying and selling are done essentially through the use of language. At the level of production, all the human beings who are involved carryout their various roles or duties with the use of language. Language use also makes the distribution of goods and services possible. In trading, the producer communicates with buyers of his goods with the use of language. International trade involves the use of language to communicate either in oral or written form. There is no way a country can carry out economic transactions with another without the use of both spoken and written language. If language is not in existence, trading among nations of the world would not be possible and this will hinder development. Language therefore, facilitates this through trade.

Technological development is promoted through language. This is because technological inventions are recorded on paper with language. Scientists who carry out technological experiment do communicate orally or in written form among themselves and to the general public with the use of one language or the other. These technological discoveries were made possible through language has enhanced development in our human society. Language is the basic tool for education and education is the fundamental tool for development. Without education, there cannot be development. Scientific discoveries which have enhanced the development were made possible by education. Education and training are conducted in all societies with the use of language. Language is equally used in non-formal education too. For instance, in our homes, children learn morals and good character from their parents through language. All these good characters and morals are very fundamental to development.

Language also plays a great role in the health system of the people in our society. This is because the health system depends mainly on language. Health professionals are trained with the use of language, and health professionals like doctors, nurses e.t.c. communicate with patients with the use of language. If a person is sick, he would make it known to people by speaking in a language they all understand. It is when the sick person has expressed the magnitude of the illness that his helpers would know the decision to take to help him. The major constraint to good health in our society is ignorance engendered by lack of adequate information and knowledge on prevention and cure. Take HIV/AIDS, for instance, what people need more is speaking to them on the preventive measures in the language they understand. In other words, prompt dissemination of accurate information through language on the causes of the disease, elementary precautions, how and where to go or seek help when the need arises as well as information on the existing facilities should be made known to them and on time too. From our discussion so far, it is clear that without the language the health institution will not function well and this will be an obstacle to development. Can we imagine where gestures are used to communicate in a hospital; the efficiency will be greatly impaired. In such a situation, hardly can the hospital handle up to five patients in a day. But with the use of language, a hospital can treat so many patients in a day.

Information dissemination is another area that development is measured and language is extensively used here to sustain development in this area. In all human societies, information dissemination is dependent on language. Infact, without language, there cannot be efficient information. Generally, information is relayed to the general public mainly with the use of language. The same thing is applied to the print and electronic media where language is used as a means of information dissemination. Since information is essential for the survival and development of societies, language which is the main means of information dissemination is even much more important. This is because without the language there cannot be effective information relay that will sustain development. For this reason, before you can inform a person or group, you must think of the language to use in order to sustain development.

CONCLUSION

Communication is very vital in human society for it encourages interaction among member of the society. This interaction in turn brings about development in the society. Language on the other hand, is the most prominent and unique system of communication among human beings. It is used virtually in every human function that ensures development. Language and communication therefore, play vital roles in achieving development and sustaining it.

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