

Rethinking Nigeria's Development Using African Traditional Communication Media for National Orientation

(2018) Calabar Journal of Liberal Studies (CAJOLIS). 20.1: Pp 345-360. (ISSN: 1115-2087).

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the problem of poor orientation of most Nigerian citizens, especially the rural dwellers, occasioned by the dearth and failure of modern media in rural Nigeria; a phenomenon that has led to a major setback in participatory governance and national development in a country. The objective of the paper is to investigate the causes of modern media failure in national orientation and development in Nigeria and to examine the need to adopt traditional African media as a viable alternative in Nigeria's national orientation and development programme especially at the grassroots. This paper assumes that African traditional communication media as effective tools have been ignored in the national orientation programmes despite their relevance to national development. The paper adopts an analytical research method to examine secondary sources of data on the constraints of modern media in rural Nigeria and the viability of African traditional media in Nigeria's national orientation and development's efforts. Findings reveal that most Nigerian citizens, especially rural dwellers, do not understand national orientation messages because they are broadcast in English rather than their respective languages and the broadcasts are made on modern media channels that exist in urban areas. Findings also reveal that that government's lack of political will, high cost of setting up community media, absence of professional journalists and selfish interests of Nigerians are factors responsible for the non-existence of modern media channels in rural Nigeria. Findings also reveal that African traditional media is very compatible to the communication needs of rural Nigerians. The paper concludes that the National Orientation Agency (NOA) in Nigeria has had reduced effectiveness and therefore, recommends the use of African traditional communication media in addition to the use of modern media such as television, radio and print materials to accord Nigerians the necessary orientation that will commit the citizens towards the task of national development.

Key Words: African Traditional Communication, Development, Media, National Orientation

Introduction

Whatever the problem of effective national orientation in the country may be, most grassroots population in Nigerian citizens may not have felt the pulse of social, economic and political information demystification. The Nigerian population at the grassroots is resident in the rural areas. They appear to be alienated by the available instruments of governance in the local government authorities and ministries. They are shut out by nature of programming and message transmission of urban modern media or global media that appeal mostly to the understanding of persons who understand the English Language. The available options of traditional media do not give them the adequate national orientation to participate in the decision making process that would contribute to the development of Nigeria.

There are little or no community radio stations in Nigeria to even serve the national orientation needs of the people. By the year 2008, Nigeria had no policy on community radio stations.” (Making a Case for Community Radio in Nigeria, www.ijhssnet.com). Consequently, useful electronic information signals were hardly extended to the Nigerian citizens in the rural areas. There are neither community newspapers nor magazines to even serve the information needs of the rural people. A good number of Nigerian citizens are invariably shut out of information that could carry them along in participatory democracy. As the heartbeat of Africa, Nigeria’s development issues, which have worsened and lingered for a long time, have become a phenomenal concern to the international community. Nigeria’s development is no longer negotiable. Development, considered as the social, economic and political changes, growth and advancement of a nation towards modernization and now post-modernization, is a process that involves the rulers and the ruled. Both the government and the citizens have big roles to play in the development of Nigeria. The citizens need to be taken along; to understand government’s policies and participate collectively in the development process.

Unfortunately, there is a wide gap between the government and the citizens who dwell in Nigeria’s rural areas. The 2012 wide protest against the government’s decision to remove fuel subsidy was an example of the direct implication of government’s alienation of the citizens in Nigeria. Lack of understanding on the issue and fear of possible inflation set into the minds of Nigerians who marched out to the streets in wide protest against the government’s proposed policy. Other social, economic and political proposals such as government’s decision to borrow money from external financial institutions and proposals for political restructuring have met with stiff resistance by Nigerians in recent years.

Part of the citizens’ resistance to government policies is occasioned by the uninformed state of the citizens as a result of lack of effective and proper orientation of Nigerians, especially the grassroots population. An estimate of about 80% of Nigerians live in the rural area and are actively engaged in subsistent Agriculture and large portions of this group are illiterates (Nwanne 53). There is a clear indication that the National Orientation Agency in Nigeria has not lived up to its billings as far as effective national orientation of a multi-ethnic state that is made up of less literate persons is concerned. The media of national orientation takes a chunk of the blame for this systemic failure. The process of national orientation in the rural areas especially seems to have ignored the significance of the African traditional communication media.

The thrust of this paper is informed and supported by the social responsibility and the normative theories. The Social Responsibility theory was propounded by Siebert Paterson and Schramm and holds that the press which enjoys a privileged position under a government is obliged to be responsible to society by voluntarily carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society. Secondly the normative theory, another basis for the main discourse in this study, a theory by Dennis McQuail (1994) holds that it is ideal for media organizations to operate within a specific system of social values.

Statement of the Problem

There is a dearth of modern media channels in rural communities and non-use of African traditional media of communication for national orientation in Nigeria, which has led to the alienation of most Nigerians from participatory governance and development efforts of the country. The problem of the dearth of modern media exists because of the absence of policies to set up media stations in the rural areas; the lack for funds to set up adequate community media and the lack of professional personnel to use the community media for national orientation and development. Consequently, national orientation programmes are transmitted on national or state owned media stations which hardly reach the rural population. Besides, where most radio and television signals reach the rural areas, patronage is relatively low due to the commitment of the rural people to other important engagements including farming. Thus, the National Orientation Agency has not lived up to its responsibility of combing the rural areas with participatory communication that will draw the rural dwellers closer to the process of national development.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this paper include:

- i. To investigate the causes of the dearth of the modern media and their inactivity in national orientation and development in Nigeria, especially in the rural areas.
- ii. To discuss traditional African media forms as significant tools in grassroots national orientation and development in Nigeria especially in rural areas.

Research questions

The paper is guided by the following research questions:

- i. What are the reasons for the non-existence of modern media or their inactivity in national orientation and development in Nigeria, especially in the rural areas?
- ii. How significant are traditional African media tools in grassroots national orientation and development especially in rural areas?

Background to National Orientation in Nigeria

In 1993, the Federal Government of Nigeria merged the Directorate of Social Mobilization, Self-Reliance and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) with three Divisions of the then Federal Ministry

of Information and Culture namely: The Public Enlightenment (PE), the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) and National Orientation Movement (NOM). The goal was to harmonize and consolidate efforts and resources of government in the fields of public enlightenment, social mobilization and value re-orientation so as to attain a formidable organ to mobilize Nigerians at all time to embrace government policies and programmes (Iredia para 3). The National Orientation Agency in Nigeria was established through the instrumentality of Decree no 100 of 1993 as MAMSER, the agency was hardly accepted as an objective tool for orientation by Nigerians. The agency itself took off on a weak note and progressively dwindled. Its ubiquitous grassroots structure that was designed to easily permeate the entire nation with effective publicity programmes was left to wither away. Iredia writes:

...its' son of the soil operational arrangement whereby its workers were to function in their places of origin and publicize their messages in the language of each community was distorted through poor personnel recruitments and developments like swapping of some State Directors as well as over bloated headquarters. (Iredia para 7).

The neglect of the grassroots structure in planting a viable National Orientation Agency marked the beginning of national orientation challenges in Nigeria. The national Orientation Agency's final undoing came to the fore when government started appointing members of the ruling political party to the posts of National and State Directors, against government's earlier enabling law that the agency should be headed by non-partisan persons. Thus, the Agency's Directors appointed at the time had little or no knowledge of the rudiments of the job and made little impact in achieving the agency's objectives to "ensure that Federal Government programmes and policies are better understood by the general public" and to "mobilize favourable opinions for such programmes and policies".

Today, a number of Nigerians have lost touch with the benefits of national orientation. There is a huge gap between government and the people of Nigeria, especially the rural dwellers. Evidently, the 2012 nation-wide fuel subsidy protests by Nigerians was one of the implications, not only of lack of national orientation, but also of lack of faith in government. It is common among most Nigerians that anything positive about government and its agencies is doubted while everything negative is believed. Despite the social mobilization efforts carried out on television and radio, including newspaper, the protests established that disseminating some high faulting statistics through illicit channels of communication does not enlighten the average Nigerian Citizen; that people have to be spoken to in the language they understand and that the fire brigade approach of educating the citizenry only when the chips are down is ineffectual.

The outbreak of the Ebola Virus Disease is a continental phenomenon that the Nigerian Government ought to have enlightened its citizenry through national orientation using effective media channels before now. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Ebola first appeared in 1976 in 2 simultaneous outbreaks in Nzara, Sudan and in Yambuku, a village in the Democratic Republic of Congo where the Ebola River is situated, and from which the disease

takes its name (WHO fact sheeted Para 5). For the Nigerian Government to wait until 2014 (about 38 years after) to commence national enlightenment about the disease is a clear indication that the National Orientation Agency is sick. For the various state governments to join the Federal Government in the awareness creation about the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) without the use of necessary and effective media of communication such as the African Traditional media is synonymous to embarking on a fruitless journey.

The process of national orientation and re-orientation, demystifying political, economic and social health issues to the citizens and getting them to participate in national development, requires reaching out to the people especially at the grassroots and working on their psyche to come to terms with government policies for development. Such grassroots participation is possible through available media of communication. In Nigeria, national orientation can be more effective if the African traditional media systems are put into use. National orientation is best when it addresses the pains, dreams, hopes and realities of the people and makes them buy into government's policy naturally. It makes the people to self-correct errors and strive to meet agreed set goals in the collective interest (Ihonvbere para 5).

A Review of Nigeria's Development Issues

Development is a relative term that is widely discussed with regards to political, social, economic, and cultural events or progress in a society. Closely related to the term "development" is the word "growth". One of the characteristics that both development and growth share however is change. Growth has gained wide acceptance as an advanced or complete state of development. Development is ordinarily viewed as progress from a low state of being to a high state of existence. It could also be taken to mean changes that have taken place within a given period of time. Most scholars have offered their contributions in attempts to define the term development. With regards to socio-economic thought, development means social changes, growth, evolution, progress, advancement and modernization (Fagerlind and Saha 29). With the exception of the term social change, all the others imply change in a specific direction that is regarded by the users as positive or highly valued. In a society, development is viewed as a process by which people create and recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choices and values (Ake 125). Development is something that people must do for themselves, although the help of others can facilitate it. People are therefore agents of development at least from a social perspective.

Development is 'a process of cumulative change that results from positive forces that raise productivity' (Arokoyu 234). Categories of 'development' comprise economic development, human development, sustainable development and territorial development (Bellu` 2011). Another suitable definition that qualifies the term development of a society is that which recognizes all aspects of human endeavours within the society. Development does not necessarily stop at economic prosperity alone, but transcends beyond it to include psychological, social, political and environmental change for the betterment and wellbeing of the society. Consequently, development is of the people, by the people and for the people. It is people oriented and therefore society establishes specific institutions to create and recreate itself towards a desirable society (Okorosaye – Orubite 3). Development is therefore understood as a change in

a desirable direction and encompassing many different dimensions. Three basic criteria for measuring development include, first, an increase in the efficiency of the production system of a society, second, the satisfaction of the population's basic needs, and third, the attainment of objectives sought by various groups and a society which are linked to the use of scarce resources. These criteria translate into economic, social and political growth or development (Furtado 636).

From the foregoing, one can infer that sustainable development is the hallmark of human development which involves the organizing principle meeting human development goals which include absence of hunger, absence of poverty, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality and clean water and sanitation. Other hall marks of sustainable human development include affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth establishment of industries and other infrastructure, peace and sustainable cities and communities.

Corruption and crime on the part of leaders and citizens of the nation have seriously contributed to slowing down development efforts of Nigeria. Nigerians' attitude or preference for foreign cultures advertised and acquired through the global media has also challenged development efforts in the country. Nigerians have almost lost confidence in the confidence of their polity and this has contributed to erosion of cultural values in Nigeria and resulted partly in poor governance thereby creating a weak economy, high unemployment, inflation, poverty and rising rate of crime and dwindling educational standards (Akinyemi 13). This factor greatly challenges the political and socio-economic prospects that could stimulate positive development in Nigeria.

Anarchic situations (wars, communal clashes), incessant political and religious crises including the recent Boko Haram phenomenon (*Boko Haram* means Western Education is evil). The group is famous for organizing suicide attacks to the detriment of citizens in public places. They target attacks on western civilization and western institutions in the country, including kidnapping young school girls. Also, the incessant attacks of Fulani herdsmen on some Nigerian communities are anti-social problems bedevilling Nigeria's development. Other problems include 'unemployment, infrastructural decay, dysfunctional educational systems, insecurity of lives and property including suicide bombing and kidnapping' (Okoye 1-5). Practices such as bribery, fraud and embezzlement of funds and criminal acts are common behaviours found among Nigerians and such behaviours constitute antagonisms to national development.

Other notable corrupt practices that negatively affect the development of Nigeria include extortion, favouritism and nepotism. Crime is an act or omission of an act for which the state can apply sanctions' (Julian and Kornblum 148). Although crime is present in all societies, it is widespread in Nigeria. Common examples of crimes in Nigeria include assault, robbery and homicide. Others include vandalism, shoplifting, lawbreaking (such as traffic violations and illicit drug trafficking), prostitution, gambling, and burglary. Corruption and crime are behavioural based factors militating against speedy development of Nigeria.

Dearth of Modern Media Communication in Rural Nigeria

Communicating with the use of modern media technology in rural communities in Nigeria is possible but has been constrained by several factors especially low literacy levels and preference

of rural dwellers to other life profiting engagements. Useful as modern media communication channels are to national orientation and national development, the establishment of community radio and television, newspapers and billboards and the ability to sustain them for national orientation purposes among the rural people is however an object of several encumbrances in Nigeria. These factors include poor policy and implementation framework, insecurity, poor communication channels, illiteracy, inadequate infrastructure, and political instability (Tsegyu and Ogoshi, Mass Media and Challenges, www.ajol.info).

The policy to set up community radio stations in rural areas in Nigeria has been in obscurity. Sadly, as at 2008, Nigeria was still left behind. From observation, all the other West African countries had policies and not only policies; they had existing, robust and very well functioning community radio regimes. Here in Nigeria, there had been attempts by individuals and groups to convince the government to initiate and promulgate a policy on community radio, there were some impressions being given particularly in some government cycles that Nigeria had a policy on that but a look at the NBC policy then would make it clear that community radio per se considering the cost and other prohibitive requirements was not going to be feasible.

Another major constraint against the success of modern media channels is the current state of insecurity in the country. The incessant kidnapping of innocent people, the sporadic shootings and bombings by the Boko Haram sect is putting the country on the pedestal for underdevelopment. The frequent occurrence of these anti-development elements is making the country lose huge investment opportunities from foreign investors. When citizens or their property cannot be protected by any government, it becomes difficult for any policy to be implemented in such areas.

Modern media can play very significant roles in the development of the rural and urban areas of any society. Several other problems have however, constrained the use of these media as tools for rural development in Nigeria. Some scholars have enumerated them to include: communication related problems, message related problems, illiteracy, the use of English Language by the electronic media, multiplicity of language in Nigeria, lack of audience feedback, ownership problem, dearth of qualified personnel, urban-centred development journalism and dearth of community based or vernacular radio/telecommunication (Asemah, Anum and Edegoh, <https://www.ajol.info>).

Other challenges have continued to face Nigeria in her attempt at starting a community radio. The greatest challenge facing Nigeria is the lack of courage by the government. Nigerian governments over the years have not demonstrated strong political will for the takeoff of community broadcasting. The lack of political will is demonstrated in a number of ways. Nigeria is a signatory of the African Charter on broadcasting which recommended the setting up of community broadcasting as the third tier of the broadcasting system. It remains one of the few African countries yet to implement fully the provisions of this charter. Nigeria, till date, has not segmented the broadcast sector into public, commercial and community broadcasting. This is unlike what happens in sister West African countries. Even in Mali, a less endowed country, the third tier of broadcasting is further segmented into community, co-operative, confessional and cultural radio stations. Apart from not implementing the African charter fully, the Nigerian

government has not enacted the enabling law to start and guide the operations of the community radio. The NBC only made provisions for the operation and regulations of the first and second tier of broadcasting. Act 38 of 1992 and its subsequent amendment Act 55 of 1999 did not make specific provisions for the licensing of community radio (Ajibade and Alabi, <https://journals.covenantuniversity.edu.ng>), however, the policy to issue community licence has been established and licences have been given out to interested operators, most of who are yet to set up community radios.

Moreover, there is the lack of an enabling environment for community media to thrive in Nigeria. The Nigerian government not only dominates the airwaves by its covetous self-allotment radio frequencies, it sees the public service stations as agents established to protect its interests. The government has a near monopoly of the airwaves in Nigeria- the existence of private broadcast stations notwithstanding. The majority of the radio stations in Nigeria are owned by the Federal and state governments. Private individuals face a lot of difficulties in obtaining broadcast licenses in Nigeria. This results in long wait. The difficulties manifest in excessive high licensing fees being paid by individual organizations. These fees range from \$75,000.00 to \$150,000.00 depending on the category of license being applied for (Ajibade and Alabi, <https://journals.covenantuniversity.edu.ng>). On the contrary, the government pays little or nothing to obtain license to set up its own station. While individuals go through bureaucratic procedures to pay for license in Nigeria, the situation is different in neighboring West African countries. For instance, in Mali, radio license for community radio is free provided the applicant is a Malian. In Ghana, a mere \$100 (one hundred dollars) is charged for application license while authorization fee is \$2,000 (two thousand dollars).

The Nature of African Traditional Media in Nigeria

The term media is all encompassing and refers to a collection of communicating mediums used to store or transmit information or data. Used as plural, 'media' is a collection of channels, vehicles or means of communication. It refers to means, something intermediate in nature or degree, an intervening substance, an intervening agency or instrument by which something is conveyed or accomplished (dictionary.com online). 'Media' can be 'mass media'; channels of communication such as technologies that can reach out to large number of persons at the same time, or social media; technologically based channels of communication that facilitate interaction among friends or peers on a given platform. A synthesis of classification of different African scholars reveals ten classes of African traditional media (Akpabio 23, as cited in Wilson 1998). They include:

1. Instrumental communication: Idiophones, Wooden drum, Woodblock, ritual rattle, Bell, Metal gong, Akankang, Ekere, Xylophone, Hand Shakers, Pot drum, Membraneophones Skin drum Aerophones Whistle, Deer horn, Ivory tusk, Reed pipe, Symbolography Decorated bamboo rino, Nsibidi, Tattoo, Chalk marks.
2. Demonstrative communication: Music Songs, Choral and Entertainment Music, Signal Cannon shots, gun shots, Whistle call, Camp fire

3. Iconographic communication: Charcoal, White dove, Kolanut, Cow tail, White clay, Egg, Feather, Calabash, Beads, Limb bones, Drinking gourds, Flag Floral Young unopened palm frond, Okon tree, Nsei, Nyama, Mimosa, Palm stems.
4. Extra-mundane communication: Incantatory Ritual, Libation, Vision Graphic Obituary, In memoriam notices
5. Visual communication: Colour White cloth, Red cloth, Black cloth, Appearance Dressing, Hairstyle
6. Institutional communication: Social Marriage, Chieftaincy, Spiritual Shrine, Masquerade
7. Venue-oriented communication, structure and features
8. Myths and legends
9. Names as communication
10. Folktales and proverbs

The Traditional African media are common means of effective and influential communication in Africa (Scannell 127). The traditional African media have assured more relevance to Africans despite the emergence of modern organs of mass communication like books, newspapers, magazines, radio, television, telex, facsimile, internet and social media in contemporary world (Osho 1). They are traditional in nature and information is likely transmitted in local languages using indigenous elements like drums and gongs. The Traditional African Media and their institutions are alternative media channels in this modern age, for reaching out to people at the grassroots. They are culturally based and are less expensive. In some cases, they use indigenous technology, they encourage communalism while information transmitted to the locals is understood and believed easily as credible. Messages transmitted through the media institutions are simple to understand especially when transmitted through the opinion leaders of the groups (Osho 4).

African traditional media have six (6) unique characteristics (Ogwezzy 9). African communication systems have value, and it is an important aspect of African culture. Values in communication deal with effectiveness of communication. Effectiveness means that messages are received by intended audience, interpreted as conceived by the sender; message is remembered over a reasonably extended period of time, and message is used appropriately. African traditional media enjoy wider reach among the rural dwellers. African media are ubiquitous because they reach many rural people who are not reached by even the most widespread exogenous channels. African communication systems are useful in conveying messages to people out of the reach of exogenous channels such as television, newspapers and magazines which are largely confined to the urban areas in the developing countries. African traditional media channels have credibility.

Messages transmitted through the exogenous (i.e. externally controlled) mass media are more often than not, greeted with hostility or skepticism. Since traditional channels are familiar to the target and controlled locally, they are quite credible. Also, African traditional media are channels

of change. Researches into the diffusion of innovations have shown the importance of informal and inter-personal contacts in persuading people to adopt, or reject innovations. Mass media are strong in creating awareness but weak in persuading people to adopt change. So, such contacts are more commonly made through the traditional channels. Hence, traditional channels of communication are important conduits of change. Therefore, it is necessary to integrate indigenous and exogenous communication systems to enhance outcomes in development.

African traditional media are useful for the collections and dissemination of development information. Development programmes can utilise traditional communication channels for the collection and dissemination of development information. Data on the local situation and response to outside initiatives can be gathered by attending village or social groups meetings and interviewing local people. At some time, participants in a communication system act as a recipient-disseminator. So, recipient-disseminators who are linked to outside societies are important conduits for lateral exchange of both indigenous and exogenous innovations. This means that there is an interface between knowledge and communication types (Chambers 97). African traditional media promotes participatory development and sustainability of programmes. While exogenous communication transfers knowledge indigenous communication promotes indigenous based development and gives the local people the opportunity to participate in development programmes.

African traditional media are attractive and the people are familiar with them. The use of idiophones, wooden drums, music and chorus in short plays at some village square during a chieftaincy installation or traditional marriage events will enable national orientation officers to pass certain messages, especially on promoting national unity and campaigning against corrupt practices that are common at every tier of government, with little or no stress. A combined use of these traditional media will be effective in sensitizing the rural people as exemplified. The use of such media, together with modern channels of communication will serve as a message or sensitization reinforcement strategy for involving the rural people in the business of orientation and sustainable development.

Summary and Conclusion

In summary, the dearth and inactivity of modern media channels in rural Nigeria is attributed to poor policy and implementation framework, insecurity and poor communication channels. Other factors include illiteracy, inadequate infrastructure, and political instability. Other reasons for the slow take-off of community broadcasting include communication related problems, message related problems, illiteracy, the use of English Language by the electronic media, multiplicity of language in Nigeria, lack of audience feedback, ownership problem, dearth of qualified personnel, urban-centred development journalism and dearth of community based or vernacular radio/telecommunication. One of the greatest challenges facing Nigeria is the lack of courage by the government. Nigerian governments over the years have not demonstrated strong political will for the takeoff of community broadcasting.

The Traditional African media remain the most viable tools for national orientation and participatory governance or development in rural Nigeria and other parts of Africa. These tools

include the town criers, puppet show, traditional dances and songs using the drums and gongs and traditional oral speeches at the village square or town hall meetings. Others include the use of community theatres and opinions or association leaders of cooperative associations, local unions that are indigenous and culturally based. They possess the capacity to propel local participation in the market place of ideas and information transmission. This paper concludes that if community media are established to function in Nigeria, they can be used in combination with the traditional African media for effective national orientation and development. Such a combination will oil the wheels of national orientation in terms of media versatility, message enforcement, media attractiveness and maximum participation of the rural people in development.

National Orientation should be treated as a process that determines the efficacy of development among other factors such as infrastructural development and provision of social amenities. The gaps in national orientation in Nigeria have led to chaos in the country and slowed down the development efforts of the government of the day. This paper therefore recommends that:

- i. The Federal Government of Nigeria should re-organize the National Orientation Agency and employ 80% of indigenes to head the respective branches in their states in addition to encouraging the establishment of community media especially in rural areas.
- ii. The heads of national orientation in the respective states should be persons who have the right qualification or who should be trained in the art of utilizing Traditional African Media including organizing regular town halls or village square meetings, featuring dramatic and musical acts among others for enlightenment and orientation especially at the grassroots.
- iii. To diffuse innovation, exogenous media communication planners need to co-opt traditional media, because traditional media enhance cultural continuity and hence sustainable change.
- iv. National orientation officers should involve the local people in the choice of channel, messages development, design and dissemination; and they should use the rural dwellers to communicate with themselves, with decision makers and with development experts in reaching a decision on their development programmes. This would enhance the retention and control of the indigenous programmes, which will enhance sustainability. It is obvious from the above discourse that those outside the indigenous areas are not in a position to package development programmes for the indigenous areas without first-hand information and experience about the indigenous people.

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