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Communication Training for Self-Reliance in Black Africa: Challenges and Strategies

by Jerry Domatob*

Abstract

This paper critically evaluates the various conceptions of self-reliance in Black Africa. It identifies some factors that may promote or hinder the realization of self-reliance in mass communication training. Observing that much of the educational philosophy and many curricula used in Black Africa's mass communication training are a colonial legacy, the author recommends that training should not just revamp such philosophies and curricula, but initiate a new, development-oriented outlook.

Résumé

L'article ci-après procède à une évaluation critique des diverses conceptions de l'auto-suffisance en Afrique Noire. Il identifie quelques facteurs qui peuvent promouvoir ou retarder la réalisation de l'auto-suffisance dans le domaine de la formation en communication de masse. Faisant observer qu'une grande part de la philosophie de l'enseignement et des programmes en usage pour la formation en communication de masse en Afrique Noire sont un héritage colonial, l'auteur recommande que la formation ne devrait pas se contenter de revoir seulement ses philosophies et programmes mais également initier une nouvelle ouverture orientée vers le développement.

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Introduction

Most Black African states which attained political independence in the early sixties, still languish under the chains of foreign domination. Almost two decades after these countries became sovereign states, former colonial masters still permeate the decision-making and policy implementation processes. Their agents and surrogates do not only control Black African states' economies but also subtly direct the political, cultural, educational, military - especially information and intelligence - services. This situation has rendered optimistic appeals such as Ghana's first President Kwame Nkrumah's call during the heydays of the nationalist struggle that "Seek ye first the political kingdom and all others would be added onto it,"¹ empty, futile and sterile.

The gravity is such that in 1983, a Nigerian state Governor Sam Mbakwe of Imo State, publicly lamented that the country's independence was achieved prematurely.² Mbakwe was simply articulating the unspoken sentiments of many Africans who despite their abhorrence of colonialism, are nonetheless convinced that the basic ingredients of self-rule are missing many years after the achievement of so-called nationhood. They have realized to their utter dismay that independence goes beyond the lowering of imperial flags and the hoisting of others. They are learning the hard way that it goes beyond anthems and pledges and even above self-identification and patriotism.

In the African continent too, the vicious policy of apartheid holds sway in South Africa through the machinations of imperialists and neocolonialists, despite world-wide protests and condemnation. Namibians too are still battling despite immense odds to break the fetters of colonial servitude and subjugation.

These despicable conditions are aggravated by general poverty, ignorance, chaos and poor leadership which abound in the heterogeneous states of the region. It can be argued therefore that Black Africa's fight for a measure of liberation is not only legitimate but mandatory. To partially achieve this objective, mass communicators like most other professionals must be trained to tackle these problems and seek solutions to them.

This paper thus examines the concept of self-reliance and enumerates some factors which may foster or hinder its realization in mass communication training. The paper argues that mass

communication training for self-reliance must not only strive at revamping Black Africa's media, educational philosophy and curriculum, which to a large extent is a colonial legacy, but should at least initiate this new mentality and approach by stressing development. However, what do we mean by self-reliance development?

Self-Reliance

Self reliance is an ambiguous concept with no universal definition. However, one of Nigeria's foremost political scientists Okwudiba Nnoli, maintains that it is a strategy of production which focuses attention primarily but not exclusively on domestic resources and priorities for the accomplishment of national objectives.³ In his view, it insists on the international environment as the major source of the resource for economic life. Nnoli contends that self-reliance forces the members of the society to provide incentives for mobilising local resources that otherwise would have lain idle, and to organise or reorganise domestic, social, economic and political relations in ways that are commensurate with the local values and changes them.

The famous essayist and columnist, Professor A.M. Babu agrees with Nnoli.⁴ However, he argues that for any African neo-colony to achieve the short-term objectives of self-reliance, it must adopt a socialist approach to development. In his perception such development must have man as the subject and object. Babu argues that to attain a rapid and all-round self-reliant development of man, the workers, peasants and other oppressed classes must together rid society of class antagonism through the establishment of a scientific socialist system.

Tanzania's former President Dr. Julius Nyerere (perhaps one of the greatest theorists of African self-reliance) suggests that it is a political and economic organisation of society where the people themselves can control their government, their administration and the way they learn living.⁵ In such a country, production must be organised to meet the needs of men. Its motive must be these needs, and it must be the needs of all - not the profit of a few. Nyerere submits that all these things mean that men must control the tools they use, their livelihood should not be at the mercy of other men's decision.

Professor Adebayo Adedeji, Chairman of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) visualises self-reliance in a broader perspective. He defines self-reliance as a process by which skill, development, technology, capital goods and services, finance and

so on are internally generated rather than imported.⁶ According to Adedeji, self-reliance implies the capability of a group as a whole to respond to the challenges of its survival and development. These challenges need not take an exclusively economic form, though they have an economic purpose. In his opinion, self-reliance could include the capabilities for handling natural disasters and protecting the country as a whole against serious damages to ecosystems. It could imply the readiness and the ability of other members to come to the aid of a member, subject to economic stress generally or of specified kinds.

Goals of Self-Reliance

Although self-reliance, as the above definitions indicate, is an ambiguous concept, it however, has a number of goals. Self-reliance is thus a development strategy which strives to make full use of a people's strength, creativity, wisdom, resources, culture and national heritage. The rationale for this goal is evident. Black African states have realised the urgency for mobilising the largely under-utilised domestic potential of their countries together with the need for them to assure responsibility for their own destiny. Self-reliance furthermore implies Black Africa's participation at all levels of social life. Self-reliance also strives at growth for the promotion of social justice, distribution and the utilization of the economy's most abundant resources to engender public participation in the development process. It further strives at reducing the concentration of economic power and wealth in few hands and attempts to establish more egalitarian patterns of international economic relations.

Moves by Black African states towards self-reliance on a national and collective basis should thus be seen as an attempt to reduce economic dependence on the advanced industrial states, so that they can rely more on themselves and promote their dignity and fuller independence. To this end, self-reliance thus applies at different levels: local, national, and international. Nigeria's President Ibrahim Babangida recently summed up some goals of African self-reliance when he declared that:

... We are convinced that self-reliance is the strategy, where our people can develop the consciousness of being the masters of their destiny. It does not mean austerity not does it mean that we need no help from our friends abroad. On the contrary, we need every help that we can get and we shall always strive to get it. However, it is our inherent right to map out our own initiative and make full use of our talents. We must move from

self-discovery to self-assertion, and be prepared to accept fully the consequences of our own mistakes. We must develop a sense of national pride, cultural identity and commitment to real economic development based on our own resources.⁷

Indeed, self-reliance does not imply autarky. It is a far cry from breaking the world up into isolated xenophobic states. Given the complex nature of world interdependence, no Black African State can exclude itself from the international system. Autarky for these countries may very well mean stagnation, where the satisfaction of the population's basic needs may not be attained on account of a number of insurmountable constraints.

Counterforce to Dependence

The notion of self-reliance appears to be inextricably linked with the dependency syndrome of Black African states. Indirectly, self-reliance suggests that dependency concepts generated within the last 20 years, provide partial explanation of the nature of underdevelopment and the quest for self-reliance.

Although dependency has been vigorously attacked for lack of evidence, it nonetheless stresses the asymmetrical nature of the global political economy, which is one of the major features of the integrated and conflict-ridden world. One writer defines dependency as the peripheral aspect of the world's capitalist system whereby former colonies and the underdeveloped countries like those of Black Africa are exploited economically, and thus their backwardness is perpetuated.

A leading dependency scholar, Johan Galtung, whose structural analysis has won many adherents, argues that the world consists of centre and periphery nations and each in turn has its centre and periphery.⁸ Dependency is thus seen as a sophisticated type of dominance relation which cuts across Black African states. It is based on a bridge-head that the centre in the centre nation establish the centre of the periphery nation for the benefit of both.

According to dependency theorists, elites in the developing countries like those of Black Africa have been co-opted into international social structure.⁹ As a result, these elites in both the centre and periphery are integrated into common value patterns, that characterize the international system. Such Black African elites have been conditioned to accept Western standards and values. In fact, their own life-styles can be maintained only if their countries continue to be in a dependent relationship with the industrialised world whose agents they have in effect become.

Most African countries suffered from the effects of colonial domination for decades and in some cases, centuries. During these long periods of colonial tutelage, the economic activities of colonialists exploited their natural resources for the development of the metropolitan centres. With such forced and unhealthy integration of the African region in the mainstream of the colonizer's social and economic order, the Black African economy was derailed and disoriented into: (a) over-specialization in raw material production, (b) over-dependency on external markets in a South-North framework; and development of enclaves in the economies of the individual African countries.

It is a surprise that the African political economist Claude Ake suggests that an economy is dependent on the international system if the articulation of its internal structure makes it incapable of autocentric development?¹⁰ All the colonial economies of Africa were, and still are dependent. Self-reliance is thus concerned with the attainment of fundamental structural redistribution of world production and trade, control over surplus generation and allocation of power at both national and international levels. Its major focus is the enhancement of Black African productive forces, surplus generation and the power to carry forward development strategies in its own interest and for its own benefit.

Media

The quest for self-reliance must not only be restricted to the political and economic spheres, but also to the media and cultural realms. As Africa's distinguished communication scholar Frank Ugboajah aptly observes:

"No attempts has been made to decolonize the Western model of communication or to integrate the traditional model. In other words, reconciliation of the western media model with existing African models in both structure and content was completely over-sighted by ruling elites. What was apparent was a change of name and ownership in some cases. The radios and televisions still talk with a minority in the same format, the same content, the same style as in the colonial era. In general, the independence era mass media talk to and not with mass heterophyllous traditional audience in the villages."¹¹

For these states wrest control of their destinies, from their former masters, training in general the same goal is imperative.

Challenges

However, factors inhibiting the emergence of such training schemes abound. These obstacles range from the present world economic system which has relegated most Black African states to "hewers of wood and drawers of water" through human conservatism to the need for adequate technology, resources and management skills.

World System

Although the dependency theory which stresses centre-periphery relations between the metropolis and satellite states, in emerging Africa has been under a barrage of criticism, it nonetheless provides an insight into the fundamental problem inhibiting any form of change in the periphery. Arguably, the umbilical chord linkage is such that most changes in the periphery require some form of approval from the centre.

Unfortunately for most Black African states, the curriculum, training, hardware and software, values and approaches to media education are to a large extent a colonial bequest.

Although mass communication teachers may be enthusiastic to revamp the existing training pattern, they can only effectively do this if it is integrally a part and parcel of national policies which involves decision-makers at the highest levels. Since most of our leaders are constantly rushing to Paris, London, New York, Amsterdam, Bonn and Moscow for advice; since our economies have been mortgaged through huge debts from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund; since most Black Africans have so far manifested some incapacity at self-rule through coups and counter-coups, it can be submitted that curriculum changes which are a radical departure from the conventional patterns in the centre could be rejected. After all "Big Brothers" are around and they are carefully watching developments in education and media training.

Conservatism

Man is essentially a conservative animal. To this end, he is very slow to change. Thus, despite the fact, most mass communication teachers pay lip service to curriculum change, very few may actually be willing to experiment, let alone implement a new training strategy, when it comes to the knitty-gritty. Most of these teachers, who are to a large extent American or British trained, sometimes

import the programs from their former *Alma mater* into the region and are very reluctant to change for any reason. Some constantly make references to what obtains in Strasbourg, Lille, Bordeaux, Columbia, Stanford and Annenberg and would fight if you dared suggest anything different. Understandably, what do we expect from Americans and Europeans in Black skin? After all, most have been indoctrinated by these western teachers and they are unwilling to grope in the dark. By the way, most of the new proposals are vague and untested.

Colonial Mentality

Despite assertions to the contrary, it can be submitted that a colonial mentality which lingers on several years after independence is a huge obstacle to curriculum change. Most of the mass media teachers belong to the first generation of Black African trainees. Most were drilled with Western bourgeois theories. Some have since retrained themselves. That however is beside the point.

The main problem is that some of our mass communication pioneer teachers like their counterparts stepped in the departing "Whiteman" shoe without the slightest intention of change. In some instances they are more orthodox than their former colonial masters and any attempt to introduce new training strategies is resisted with unabated force. This mentality tends to frustrate and pre-empt any meaningful reforms either in the curriculum or program. The colonial mentality is thus an inhibiting factor towards media training for self-reliance.

Elite Interest

Most mass communication scholars like their counterparts in the other professions belong to the elite class by dint of their training. Although some have well-meaning intentions, most cannot deviate from the norms of their peer groups. Consequently, most may not mind a trip to Europe every summer for shopping, open a foreign account in one of the banks, a house in London, Paris or California. When they compare themselves to their colleagues in other professions, it suddenly dawns on some that they are toiling night and day to build the nation, while others are looting from the state coffers. In fact, while they are busy baking cakes, others are sharing it. Now some mass communication teachers agree that their pay is in heaven. However, like their colleagues in the other professions, they are now looking for a bit of it here. This retrogressive facet of elite interest which permeates

some of our departments does not augur well for meaningful changes in our budding departments in launching self-reliance training programmes.

Leadership

The leadership malaise which plagues most Black African states is arguably one factor inimical to mass communication training for self-reliance. Just as we have some strange men parading themselves in our respective states as leaders, so we may find some in our schools and departments of journalism. Such heads are susceptible to greed and graft, easily yield to pressures of clan and kin and they do not look beyond the immediate horizon.¹² Such men at the helm of budding institutions do not sow the seeds of discord but may also stifle worthwhile programs like suggestions for improvements in the curriculum. Rather than infuse a sense of leadership in the institute, such directors may embark upon corrupt, nepotic and ill-conceived programs which may jeopardise attempts to introduce communication training for self-reliance.

Dependence

Our present dependency on the developed countries for training technology, textbooks, journals and other reading materials renders most of our proposals on training for self-reliance a simple exercise in rhetoric.

As long as we keep importing cameras, television equipment, printing presses, video-tapes and cassettes as well as the other training facilities, Black Africa cannot achieve this laudable objective. As we argue elsewhere:

Development journalism is a social technology. As a technology, it is a branch of moral philosophy. The use and development of technology depends on moral decisions about what new ideas and behaviour patterns need to be encouraged and which of the old social patterns can be strengthened and integrated. How you achieve these decisions is an operational question.¹³

For a Black African state to even think of training for self-reliance, the issue of technology, books and other teaching aids which are new stumbling blocks must be tackled.

Philosophy

Although several Africans have received training in communications and training institutes which now abound, there is almost a total absence of African thought or philosophy in these schools. Indeed, there is no body of thought about communications in African societies which would provide the grounding for course organisations and basic textbooks, define key questions and a theoretical framework for more systematic research as well as outline the fundamental objectives of national or Pan-African communication policy.¹⁴

Since such a body of thought is non-existent, teachers cannot trace the outlines of a public philosophy of communication based on research in the Black African socio-cultural milieu and evolve theories of communication for testing empirical research.¹⁵ This makes communication training for self-reliance a very difficult task.

In sum, it can be submitted that training for self-reliance in Black Africa is inhibited by poor leadership, inadequate resources, and dependence. In addition, other factors like the colonial mentality, attitude to work, elite interest, greed and graft also hinder efforts in that direction.

Policies

Despite these hurdles the prospects are not totally bleak if some policy options are embarked upon. To this end, Black African states have a number of concrete steps they can take to attain a measure of success towards their quest for communication training for self-reliance.

Definition

First and foremost, Black African communication scholars in concert with national leaders must define what they mean by self-reliance. In this regard, fundamental questions must be raised. Issues such as self-reliance for who and for what should be addressed. The goals of self-reliance too should be mapped out and the possibilities, problems, strategies for implementation and prospects envisaged. If this basic assignment is properly done and people have some insight into the objective, then communication scholars can reflect on ways and means of incorporating it in their training curricula and respective programs. If the term is not clarified, mass communication trainers would not be able to integrate it into their programs.

National Policies

However, the training of communicators is done within a given context and framework under set guidelines which are written or unwritten. American journalists are trained in a country where their constitution proclaims that "we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal". They are educated in an environment where the fifth amendment categorically states that "government shall make no law abridging the freedom of the press". Communication majors are trained in environments where journalists are respected citizens who can move from radio broadcasting and film acting to the presidency of the republic. Journalists in America are not secondary school drop outs or reckless and irresponsible truants. Some are actually very educated men with unimpeachable integrity.

If African states want self-reliance as one of the communication training goals, then it must be included in the national media policy. However, it is not the production of the policy document that really matters. Rather it is the spirit and manner of implementation that counts.

Notwithstanding, it is time African governments drew up clear-cut policies for their countries. Nwosu provided a possible framework in Jos last September and it could serve as a basis for drafting such policies.¹⁶ Communication experts in the respective African states could be asked to assist in the process.

Planning

Granted that self-reliance is adopted as one of the policy goals for communication training, planning towards its successful implementation is indispensable. Black Africa is bedevilled by the problem of poor planning. Since very little fore-thought is given to projects, they most times end in limbo. Although the problem in developing states like those in Black Africa make nonsense of planning, it is definitely very useful in curriculum development and educational institutions. Planning permits the institution to acquire the training material, staff, books and other facilities. In a way, it is indispensable for a successful program.

Research

Research is a very crucial factor which may favour communication training for self-reliance. Research finding could enable both the planners and staff to orientate the program in a

different direction. It could enable them to recruit the right calibre of students and staff. Research may also facilitate the task of curriculum development, the acquisition of training aids as well as the installation of the needed infrastructure. Black Africans have a lot to gain from the experience of other states and organisations. If they intend to launch communication programs for self-reliance then it is mandatory that they do some research.

Technology

Technology is central to mass communications in general and training in particular. Its importance is such that the great Canadian communication scholar Marshall McLuhan asserted that the medium was the message. Training for self-reliance requires a certain mastery of technology. It demands that Africans acquire not only the rudiments but a deep understanding of the way radios, televisions, printing presses, and media technology are produced, maintained and assembled. If they can manage the technology, let alone embark upon a level of production, Africa would be on the path of self-reliance. Training for self-reliance therefore requires that Black African technicians and engineers acquire appropriate technological skills for hardware innovation which they can pass on to their students.

Curriculum

Some African curriculums were developed in conformity with the training needs of what was deemed necessary in the immediate post independence era. Other programs have since emerged in various parts of the continent. It can be argued that most of these programs were designed in keeping with what obtains in North America. Training communicators for self-reliance demands that these programs be critically studied and reviewed to meet the challenges. Curriculum planners, for example, could introduce development communication at the first and fourth years with particular emphasis on how to use the media in the process.

The production techniques taught to the students is also important. Courses could be taught in such a way that students must visit rural areas and the urban poor to highlight their needs and problems. In fact, training for self-reliance demands that Black Africa answer Zimbabwe's acting Minister of Labour, Manpower Planning and Social Welfare, Comrade Ernest Kadungure's question when he asked.

Are we to be culturally shaped by foreign values which are skillfully implanted in the television soap operas, music and other cultural forms without seriously designing our training to tap the rich resources in Africa more positively?¹⁷

This is surely the crux of the problem.

Books

Books are among the main vehicles for the spread of knowledge. However, mass communication books written by Africans for Africa are very few and far between.¹⁸ If Black Africans intend to acquire a measure of self-reliance in this field then, they must address this crucial issue. Indeed Zimbabwe's Minister of Labour, Manpower Planning and Social Welfare stressed this point when he said:

Our reliance on communication textbooks conceived, produced and published in the East and West must be replaced with the active development of African communication textbooks, seen through the eye of the African researcher and produced in Africa for an African readership.⁽¹⁹⁾

Regional Co-operation

Black African states have abundant resources which can be rationally utilized to achieve a degree of self-reliance in media training. Although the material resources are limited the manpower is growing by leaps and bounds. Staff and students from various departments and schools can be exchanged. Curriculums can be jointly developed. Collective book projects could be embarked upon.

However, if we expect any success, then the general suspicions, petty jealousies, rivalries and intrigues which have destroyed many experiments at regional co-operation must be nipped in the bud.

Conclusion

Self-reliance in mass communication training is not only possible but necessary in Black Africa. However, the concept is vague and needs clarification. This notwithstanding, it has some clearcut goals. These include; African people's capacity to control their environment; the ability of Black Africans to participate in

government as well as the leaderships ability to win people's confidence.

However, several forces may hinder its realization in the training of mass communicators. These include inadequate resources, technological dependence, poor leadership, conservatism and entrenched elite interest.

However, with planning, research, funding, a measure of technological innovation, curriculum redesign, textbook development, and regional co-operation, a measure of success can be obtained. As one French author aptly stated: "Tant qu'il y a la vie, il y a de l'espoir".

NOTES

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19. Comrade Ernest Kadungure. Op. Cit.