

Participatory Democracy and Communication of Development: A Case Study of Political Campaign Advertisements in Nigeria's 2003 Election

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ABSTRACT The improvement in the quality of life of the people is the centrepiece of development and proponents of the dominant paradigm in development communication identify a participant lifestyle as a prerequisite for modernity. With this background in mind, the paper examines attempts by Nigerian politicians particularly those seeking a second term in office, to influence voting behaviour in the run off to the 2003 elections. Fully conscious that the active participation of the electorate would determine their electoral fortunes, they resorted to "democracy dividends/continuity" advertisements where they chronicled their attempts to add value to the lives of the people in specific and graphic ways. This paper critically examines these adverts and charts a road map towards making participatory democracy a more effective harbinger of development.

INTRODUCTION

After being in office for four years the elected politicians in Nigeria's fourth republic were ready for the renewal of their mandate as guaranteed by the constitution. And no better way to do this than to flood the media especially via advertisements with their record of achievement in every conceivable sector. This is of course a far cry from the attitude of the military rulers who only recently retraced their footsteps back to their barracks where they rightly belong. The military are accountable to no one more so the people that they rule over. They do not need to show any record of achievement as their mandate flows from the barrel of the gun rather than a genuine expression of the people's wishes.

Back to the advertisements by incumbent office holders, one would naturally wonder why advertise? After all the electorate, the recipients or beneficiaries of these achievements would be aware since they apparently would be enjoying the facilities and services. Perhaps these adverts were intended to send the correct signals to their political parties that they deserved a second chance. It is also conceivable that these office holders are fully acquainted with the public relations' rule of thumb – if you do not blow your trumpet no one will blow it for you.

I believe the primary concern of the advert was to keep in the front burner the achievements of such office holders; a constant reminder to the electorate of the shape of better things to come if given another chance. The adverts also

served the more elevated purpose of enumerating the gains of democracy. No wonder in popular parlance these records of achievements are called the "dividends of democracy" perhaps a sharp contrast and reminder of the long night of military rule.

These attempts to use communication, specifically political advertising, to show case development (democracy dividends) seems to be an interesting footnote to the literature in the area of communication and development more so the dominant paradigm. The founding fathers in the field conceived of development as entailing social transformation and basic cultural change (Chu 1994). How to go about this and the place of communication in the equation has been the subject of much debate and soul searching.

The dominant paradigm of development described by Uche (1999) as an "export model" where the mass media was the hypodermic needle in the propagation of development agenda was doomed to failure. He quoted Rogers (1976) who acknowledged the failings of this postulation based on the incorrect but unproved assumption about the power of the mass media. (ibid.).

The other school of thought felt that societal transformation would be ushered in through breaking the bondage of dependency via a Marxist style revolution (Chu, 1994). This has also received a lot of knocks. And the collapse of the leading light of the Marxist way of ordering society – The Soviet Union – calls to question the soundness of the dependency school's approach.

To see the place that the footnote – political advertisement – occupies, it is best to examine in some detail the concept of development itself.

DEVELOPMENT

The concept of development is subject to varying interpretation depending on one's calling, research interest and even background. Walter Rodney (1976) sees development as involving improvement in the quality of life resulting in less hazard and uncertainties with the people having a greater say over their destinies. The accelerating rate of improvements in the quality of life in and achievements in the west has resulted in the concept being equated with growth, industrialization, modernization, change and democracy from the purview of western experience of historical change (Oso, 2002).

Other scholars such as Uche (1999) and Casmir (1991) see development as located within a cultural and situational context. In other words, it is not enough to simply ape the western model, the expectations and world view of the people – who will be the recipients of development – has to be factored in. No wonder Casmir (1991) notes that “the significant question ... is not whether development is desirable but what kind of development should be sought. (Uche, 1999).

Development in a developing country like Nigeria based on this viewpoint would mean paying much needed attention to infrastructural development. To elaborate, in the specific case of Nigeria, the poor road network and inefficient rail system in the country has been an impediment to economic growth. Electricity supply has continued to be epileptic in spite of massive injection of funds and added tremendously to the cost of manufactured items quite apart from discouraging new entrants into the manufacturing sector. Public water supply is very poor and is like a drop in the ocean. Other areas needing attention would embrace provision of qualitative education, affordable health care, employment generation, adequate food supply at affordable rates and so on.

Development from the purview of improving the life and well being of the people is enabled by citizen participation in governance. It stands to reason that if citizens approve or reject candidates at the polls based on their performance in the index of improving the welfare of the people, office holders would make this the fulcrum of their activity. This involvement of the people in

electing or rejecting leaders at the polls has some similarity with the postulation of the dominant paradigm that sees “modernity as a participant life style; a modern society is a participant society” (Oso, 2002)

Even though we do not entirely see development as the ushering in of the western model we believe that citizen participation which the proponents of the modern paradigm equate with development is an important footnote that is worth further exploration. This is because if citizen participation were fully in place as in outcome of elections reflecting the true wishes of the people then an important landmark would have been reached in the improvement of the life of the people. Those who work at variance with this would be voted out while those with the welfare of the people at heart would hold sway. This way a country like Nigeria would then live out the word and spirit of the constitutional provision to wit that “the security and welfare (emphasis mine) of the people shall be the primary purpose of government”.

Interestingly this desire to show the people how their welfare has moved some notch formed the basis of the political advertisements under study. But first the methodology employed in the study.

METHODOLOGY

Conscious of the fact that their fortunes at the polls would to some extent depend on their achievements, elected office holders during the run up to the 2003 elections bought space in newspapers and magazines to showcase their achievements during their first term 1999 – 2003. This paper examines the “democracy dividends” contained in these adverts. The study period covered January to April 2003 and two newspapers – The Punch and The Guardian were deliberately chosen. The Punch was chosen because it appeals to a mass audience; politics being a game of numbers. The Guardian on the other hand recommends itself being an elite newspaper whose content would appeal to opinion leaders who would in turn influence the voting behaviour of persons under their sphere of influence.

“DEMOCRACY DIVIDENDS” POLITICAL ADVERTS

The incumbent president, governors and

other office holders resorted to the “democracy dividends” political adverts to show the electorate that they were deserving of a second term in office. This effort involved communicating developments – showing how they have positively impacted the life and welfare of the people. There were 98 advertisements in all. The Punch newspapers had 65 and The Guardian 33. These adverts also fit neatly into the following categories; investment, roads, water, infrastructure, education, energy, health, and appeal to be allowed to continue the task started during the first term in office which we shall label “continuity”

a. Investment: One governor that harped on this a lot is Chimaroke Nnamani of Enugu State. In his “profiles in democracy dividend”¹ he credits his administration with the 650 million Euros (N80 billion) Nigeria Breweries owned Heineken Plant in the state. He describes this as the largest foreign direct investment outside of the petroleum sector in the country. He also takes credit for the siting of the multi-million Naira ultra-modern Pepsi/Seven up plant at Ngwo. This glorying is understandable because of the belief that investment would generate employment and improve the economy thus benefiting the people.

b. Roads: The poor state of the roads in the country engaged the attention of this category of office seekers. Governor Bola Ahmed Tinubu claimed that he improved upon and in some cases built new roads and the checklist includes “Igando, Kudirat Abiola Way, Awolowo Road Ikoyi, Yaba- Itire Road etc”² Governor Niyi Adebayo’s performance sheet included “road network”³ without specifying details. The governor’s friends under the aegis of Otunba Adeniyi Adebayo Committee of friends (OACOF) eastern and south zone also give him full marks for “transportation and roads”⁴

Unlike Governor Adebayo, Governor Chimaroke Nnamani provides a comprehensive list of his activities in this area⁵. In the Guardian of January 15, 2003 he provides a checklist of completed roads projects as well as the roads undergoing rehabilitation⁶. Alhaji Ahmadu M’uazu of Bauchi State gets a pass work for construction of roads in an advert by Mohammed M. Abdullahi⁷. Still on roads, Governor Abdullahi Adamu takes

credit for Obi-Keana Road⁸ in Nasarrawa State.

c. Water: Provision of potable water was also in the front burner in the calculation of these office seekers in their attempt to woo the electorate. Governor Nnamani of Enugu State claimed credit for the N1.2 billion federal government funded Enugu water scheme at Oji River⁹. Governor James Ibori graphically captured his achievements in this area. The body copy of the advert makes interesting reading:

Then:

Before Ibori, there was water, water everywhere but none to drink. Water-borne disease kill[sic] people with ease

Now:

There is refreshing pipe-borne water in every hamlet to (sic) enjoy thanks to the life spring of Delta....Governor Ibori. The difference is Ibori, the difference is crystal clear¹⁰.

d. Infrastructure: Infrastructural developments showcased in the political adverts included expansion of Ogbette and Kenyatta market, rehabilitation of Hotel Presidential and Nike Lake Resort and Construction of the N600 million permanent site of the Enugu International Trade Fair¹¹ all credit to Governor Nnamani. Details of his administration’s activities in infrastructural development was provided by Governor Ibori in The Guardian of April 2, 2003¹². Other office seekers had third parties do the trumpeting on their behalf Prince S. Ajijola gave Governor Niyi Adebayo full marks in infrastructural development in Ekiti State.¹³ Chief Kaoli Olusanya and Architect Kayode Anibaba give Governor Bola Tinubu’s administration credit for the Oba Ayangbunren housing estate in Ikorodu¹⁴. The former in a separate advert names as part of the governor’s score card in this area an oil palm estate at Igbogbo, rehabilitation of Ikorodu palm settlement, cattle market Imota, Piggery Estate Bagidan, LSDPC Housing Estate Odo Nla, Ayangbunren Housing Estate Phase II.¹⁵

One northern governor was not left out in this show of infrastructural development. Governor Abdullahi Adamu takes credit for Nasara Packing Factory, Aghadi, Akwanga and provides pictorial evidence¹⁶. He also has to his credit rural solar electricity and water projects at Duduguru jenkwe¹⁷.

- e. Education:** Efforts at adding value to the education sector also feature prominently in the political adverts. In his series on how various sectors are “working” under his administration, Governor James Ibori gives details of his rehabilitation and construction work in this sector.

Then:

Education was in shambles, rickety classroom, unruly students, unpaid teachers. “Educashun” wasn’t “wurkin”.

Now:

...construction of 2,270 additional classrooms. Construction of fences /gates and gates houses in 726 primary school premises. Construction of libraries in 112 primary schools. Construction of 277 toilet facilities in 271 primary schools. Provision of 88,910 desk/benches to schools. Rehabilitation and renovation of 136 secondary schools (and) equipping of 20 model schools with boarding and residential facilities for pupils and staff¹⁸. In the case of Governor Nnamani, his efforts in this sector he calls “social engineering” and this embraces.

Comprehensive renovation of 180 primary schools in the state. Comprehensive renovation of 85 secondary school (5 per local government). Provision of 51,000 fourseater, desk (3000 per LGA) and 5000 teachers’ tables and chairs.

Construction and handing over of the Air Force comprehensive High School Agbani. 25% increase in primary school and 20% increase in secondary school enrolment since 1999. Overall fourth placing in 2002 JAMB/UME results nationwide¹⁹.

Governor Tinubu in addition to providing desk and benches also restructured primary schools²⁰. He started the free milk school programme²¹ and takes credit for the movement of Lagos State Polytechnic to its permanent site²² Governor Abdullahi Adamu takes credit for the take off of Nasarawa State University, Keffi²³

- f. Energy:** The energy sector was also the focus of some of the campaign ads. Governor Nnamani in his series on “Profile in Democracy Dividends”, mentions electrification of rural areas in the various senatorial zones of Enugu State as part of his achievement²⁴. Governor Bola Tinubu in his ad titled “we are no 1” takes credit for

pioneering independent power project and increased energy supply²⁵ that is generating 270 megawatts into the national grid at Egbin, Ikorodu²⁶. He is also actively involved in rural electrification²⁷. Governor Adamu’s score card contain electricity with no details mentioned.²⁸ Governor Abdullahi Adamu on the other hand provides pictures of his rural solar electricity project at Duduguru Jenkwe²⁹.

- g. Health:** Adding value to the health sector also formed the subject of the ads under study. Governor Tinubu expressed his concerns in the sector thus “that the health of our people is truly the symbol of our wealth”³⁰ Details of his achievement include free eye screening, free eye glasses, free eye surgery, emergency ambulance services, free antenatal care, S.L. Edu General Hospital, Agege etc³¹. Governor Ibori in his own assessment claimed that the “health care delivery system was sick”³² and of course he has given it the necessary breather. Governor Ahmadu³³ and Adeniyi³⁴ are given pass marks in this sector while Governor Abdullahi Ahmadu takes credit for free health delivery³⁵.

- h. Continuity:** The incumbent office holders harped understandably on the need to be given a second chance to complete the good work they had started. The ad copies canvassing this viewpoint makes interesting reading. In an ad in The Punch of April 2, 2003, President Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar are depicted as labourers carrying out the task of building Nigeria³⁶ and the body copy says it all.

The nation was in very bad shape time and continuous effort is needed to put her back in good shape. Support the nation builders . . . that we may be safely there.

In another copy the duo don superman attire and the pay off line reads “let’s support the heroes of our time”³⁷

Concerned Enugu State Academics bought space to call for the re-election of Governor Chimaroke Nnamani and the ad was aptly titled “why Chimaroke Nnamani should be given a second mandate”³⁸

In all the continuity adverts, the advertisers take pain to list achievements or benefits of the administration to the people as the *raison d’être* for continuity.

CONCLUSION

Participatory democracy has translated to office holders embarking upon development schemes that directly impact and positively too, the lives of the people. This excursion has shown efforts at road rehabilitation and construction, provision of pipe borne water, health facilities, equipping of schools and so on. All these communication of development as seen in the political adverts under study were intended to swing votes in favour of incumbent office holders. Apparently the fear or concern about the electorate seem to be the beginning of political wisdom for this category of office seekers. This of course speaks volumes about democracy's ability to engender development.

The infrastructures and other people-oriented projects embarked upon by the incumbent office holders are in line with Oso's (2002) views that when the people participate in governance it will usher in a modern society or a society where all the good things of life are fully in place. Rodney (1976) also alludes to this when he opines that improvement in the quality of life is tied to the people having a greater say over the running of their affairs.

Some of these claims or record of achievements were challenged by the political opponents of the incumbents. A particularly bitter campaign was waged in Kwara State where every attempt was made by the main challenger to the Governor – Dr. Bukola Saraki - to paint the former black. In "April Fool"³⁹ ad for instance, the latter claimed that Governor Lawal has not fulfilled his promise of providing electricity and water and improving on agriculture and healthcare. He also alleged that he failed to carry out his promise to enthrone accountability. If the election result is anything to go by the people roundly rejected the incumbent governor. His party ANPP lost in the Governor's district, local government, ward and even in the polling booth outside government house⁴⁰ in the earlier elections. And in the governorship election he also lost.

Similarly Obasanjo's desire for continuity and records of achievements were questioned by his main challenger – General Muhammadu Buhari. Buhari in his ads picked holes in almost every sector. As regards healthcare, he noted that "government hospitals under the Obasanjo presidency became places where people go to die."⁴¹ As regards the energy sector he had this to say:

Can we put up with this chaos in the fuel sector for another four years? What kind of continuity are they talking about? Continuity of non-maintenance of refineries, fuel importation and queues.⁴²

This claim and counter claims also played out among other contenders. The significant thing really is that whether or not the records of achievements are bloated or false, we see a genuine desire to be on the right side of the electorate at least by incumbent office holders in trying to account for their first tenure. In other words, development as seen in the context of the democracy dividends must be such that meets the yearnings of the people or is culturally relevant (Uche 1999; Casmir 1991) hence the provision of the basic necessities as indicated in the advertisements. The political opponents of the incumbents also went to great length to show that the present office holders did not have a pass mark in this critical index. Whether the mass media is better at disseminating these pieces of information and convincing the electorate is another matter in the light of the media's inability to bring about attitude change.

It is the contention of this writer that rather than a single term, the present situation of giving opportunity for re-election of incumbent office holders should continue. Their desire for a second term would result in paying tremendous attention to development and the communication of development via the agency of political adverts and other avenues. This gives a breath of life to the almost discarded dominant paradigm in that participatory democracy ushers in development. Development that is people-oriented and environmentally conscious; that factors in the concerns and needs of the people as the primary purpose of government.

NOTES

1. The Guardian Wednesday January 29, 2003 p. 16
2. Sunday Punch January 19, 2003 p. 21
3. The Punch Wednesday January 15, 2003 p. 35
4. The Punch Tuesday February 24, 2003 p. 39
5. The Guardian on Sunday February 2, 2003 p. 6\
6. The Guardian Wednesday January 15, 2003 p. 28
7. Sunday Punch April 13, 2003 p. 23
8. Sunday Punch April 13, 2003 p. 34
9. The Guardian Wednesday January 29, 2003 p. 16
10. The Punch Wednesday January 15, 2003 p. 28
11. The Guardian Wednesday January 29, 2003 p. 34
12. The Punch Wednesday April 12, 2003 p. 15
13. The Punch Wednesday January 15, 2003 p. 35
14. The Punch Monday April 7, 2003 p. 14

15. The Punch Monday April 7, 2003 p. 63
16. Sunday Punch April 13, 2003 p. 34
17. Sunday Punch April 13, 2003 p. 34
18. The Punch Tuesday February 24 2003 p 30
19. Sunday Punch February 9, 2003 p. 13
20. The Guardian March 22, 2003 p. 12
21. The Guardian Monday March 1, 2003 p. 68
22. The Punch Monday April 7, 2003. p 63
23. Sunday Punch April 13, 2003 p. 34
24. The Guardian Wednesday February 18, 2003 p. 16
25. Sunday Punch January 19, 2003 p. 21
26. The Punch Monday April 7, 2003 p. 64
27. The Punch Monday April 7, 2003 p 63
28. Sunday Punch April 13, 2003 p. 23
29. Sunday Punch April 13, 2003 p 24
30. Sunday Punch January 12, 2003 p 21.
31. The Guardian Monday February 24, 2003 p. 39
32. The Guardian Saturday January 11, 2003 p. 42
33. Sunday Punch April 13, 2003 p. 23
34. The Punch Monday February 24, 2003 p 39
35. Sunday Punch April 13, 2003 p. 34
36. The Punch Wednesday April 2, 2003 p 50
37. The Guardian Thursday March 14, 2003 p. 14
38. The Guardian April 5, 2003 p 16
39. The Punch Tuesday April 1, 2003 p. 38
40. The Guardian Tuesday April 15, 2003 p. 21

41. This Day Wednesday March 18, 2003 p. 65
42. This Day Tuesday March 25, 2003 p 71

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