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**Social and Behavioural Change Communication and Economic Sustainability: Creating a balance between Consumption and Production Economic Practices in Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

The role of development communication for sustainable economy in any nation cannot be overemphasized. Although the function of communication generally is to create shared meaning and exchange of ideas as well as information, the essence of every positive communication is to promote development in the society. In recent times, the crisis rocking the Nigerian economy and rising inflation amidst insecurity, calls for a holistic approach from the perspective of social and behavioural change communication (SBCC) to address the problem. This paper therefore, explored the nexus between SBCC and economic sustainability with the aim of striking a balance between production and consumption economic practices amongst Nigerians. The discourse concluded that for economic sustainability to be achieved in Nigeria, development communication or SBCC must be used to build vital institutions and social structures that promote production economy than consumption economy in all sectors. The paper adopts the review of relevant literature as the methods for data collection. The paper also recommended that political actors and policy makers in Nigeria should utilize the development communication approach to answer economic questions in order to shift from consumption to production. This will assist in boosting the dwindling economy of Nigeria. Government at all levels should create a synergy with development communicators to arrest some of the factors hindering the growth of the Nigerian economy.

*Keywords: Communication, SBCC, development, production, economic sustainability.*

**Introduction**

Myriads of problems are plaguing Nigeria and African countries. One of these most worrisome problems which is also metamorphosing into an epidemic, is economic sustainability and production. An issue that needs to be addressed through development communication or social and behavioural change communication (SBCC) approach. Communication, which is succinctly

defined as the process of creating shared meaning, opinions and ideas; is not separated from development, be it human, national or socio-economic development.

The implication is that both communication and development operate as processes-activities that are on-going. However, communication activity or process will be meaningless if the message of communication is not understood by the targets of communicators. For this reason, individuals, governments and organisations are always in search of better and effective way of communicating with one another, citizens and organisational publics.

Knowledge of communication is therefore needed to improve upon production and economic sustainability or recovery. Also, economic development efforts need effective communication to succeed. Since economic experts need to work closely with development agents in order to succeed, it follows that both development agents and government must understand each other to be effective. This understanding certainly comes from development communications. The above, clearly shows that there is a strong interconnection between development communication and the economy to the extent that there will be no meaningful economic viability or economic drive without development communication.

Cates, Crandell, Diehl and Coyne-Beasley, (2018) corroborated the above view, when the author opines that development communication is central to the process of economic growth to the extent that the dependence of one on the other has virtually been taken for granted. To properly understand the relationship between the two concepts; development communication and economy, it is important to contextualize the role of development communication in the achievement of economic sustainability. Therefore, it is against this backdrop that this paper explored the nexus between SBCC and economic sustainability with the aim of striking a balance between production and consumption economic practices amongst Nigerians.

## **Theoretical Perspectives**

Of the dominant theoretical perspectives found helpful in analysing this discourse, are the development media theory and theory of production.

**Development Media Theory:** The development media theory was propounded by Denis McQuail in 1987. The theory sees the media as pivots for national development, including socioeconomic development. Cates, et al., (2018) opine that the central thrust of the theory is that the mass media in developing nations should be used for “the primacy of national development task (economic, social, cultural and political); the pursuit of cultural and informational autonomy; support for democracy; and solidarity with other developing countries.” This implies that, for economic sustainability to be achieved, there must be national development driven by communication, in this case, development communication.

Domegan, (2021) added that with development media theory, the media should focus on the collective interest of the society and not the selfish interest of few individuals. It proposed that government can intervene and foster development through the use of communication programmes and action (policies). Communication can be used for information, creation of awareness, education, mobilization and persuasion for the good of society.

McKinley, Burdon and Shellock, (2023), also posited that “development media theory advocates media support for an existing political regime and its effort to bring about national economic development and recovery.” The theory emphasized that the media must play supportive role to government policies and programmes rather than being critical of governments, its programmes and personnel. Again, in the context of economic sustainability, the development media theory assumes that media should promote economic reforms that boost the economy rather than ingratiate with government policies that dwindle the economy.

**Theory of Production:** The theory of production was propounded by Tjalling Koopmans in 1957. It examines the relationship between the factors of production (land, labour, capital, entrepreneur) and the output of goods and services. The theory is based on the short run, as a period of production that allows production to change the amount of variable input, in this case, labour. While on the long run, the period of production should be long enough for producers to adjust various inputs to analyze the best mix of the factors of production. In a nutshell, the theory

of production helps a producer or an economy, such as the Nigerian economy, to determine the best use of resources to effect output or production.

Britton, Domegan and McHugh, (2021) opine that in the present times, production takes place by the combination forces of various factors of production such as land, labour, capital etc. In this connection, socialist and mixed economic countries are using different patterns of level of factors of production for their respective industrialization policy according to the taste, demand and nature of their countrywide population, its size, location and environment. Nigeria is a third world country. Therefore, it is essential for Nigeria to go for mass industrialization to strengthen her economy. For this purpose to be accomplished, her policies for industrialization must be well planned, well defined and very thoughtful. The development of the economy is dependent on the industrial policies of the country.

### **Economic Practices in Nigeria**

An average Nigerian depends on consumption more than production economic practices. Giuseppe, Anatoliy, Corrado and Alessio (2020) defined economic practices as the system of production, resource allocation, and distribution of goods and services with respect to demand and supply between economic agents. As a result, an economic system is a variant of the social system in which it exists. Economic practices are also influenced or affected by a number of factors such as dominant culture, law, economic history, availability of resources, technological innovation, etc.

However, contrary to what ideal economic practices should be, a lot of Nigerians and Africans in general engage in negative practices. The list of these docile economic practices is endless, but includes the following problems;

1. Crave or passion for foreign goods or products: A reasonable percentage of the Nigerian population prefer foreign products to domestic ones. This has created a helpless situation, leading to a state of inferiority complex in the eyes of first world countries. Wilson (2017) opines that even among some of the educated elites, there is a craving for foreign things and a general condemnation of all things indigenious.

2. Bad governance: In Africa, more than 90% of African nations appear not to be developing as claimed by their leadership. Although most of these nations had their national independence in the 1950s and 1960s, the prevailing ailing economic situation of these national territories appears to add more credence to possible prevalence of nontransparent leadership and untruthful governance (Okoye, 2021). The absence of quality, selfless, vision- driven, realistic policy guidelines, and accountability leadership in any nation is referred to as bad governance. Bad governance is not merely a function of unimplemented manifesto, but also a product of deep-rooted corrupt system in operation. Bad governance is also an economic practice where government officials or public office holders embezzle money from the country's treasury and invest in other countries in the disguise that it yields profit to them while actually boosting the economy of such countries at the expense of theirs. This is the case in Nigeria. The media is still setting agenda on the need to end bad governance in Nigeria as it has affected the Nigerian economy drastically.

3. Over-dependence on one mineral resource (crude oil): One of the major causes of Nigeria's economic problems was over dependence on crude oil as a major source of revenue for the government and sustenance of the nation. If not for subsidy removal, with the present fall in the prices of crude oil in the foreign exchange market, it becomes very difficult for government to finance the nation's budget comfortably and to live up to expectations of the masses. Even at that, some Nigerians cannot attest to the fact that they are satisfied economically with the situation of things around them. Therefore, even if the oil prices were favourable, there is no evidence to support that the favourability is going to be steady owing to the level of politics played in the foreign exchange market.

4. Insecurity: A factor that is not considered hindering to the growth of Nigerian economy is insecurity. Although there is public outcry about the alarming rate or spate of insecurity in the country, some citizens have also not seen it to be a disturbing trend. However, it is pertinent to understand that insecurity is imperious to the economy of any nation. Media warnings on crimes such as kidnapping, terrorism and Boko-Haram insurgency especially in the North, and the

militancy in the Southern and Eastern parts of the country are falling on deaf ears. Okoye (2021) opined that the scale of insecurity, banditry, killings, chaos and war in Nigeria has heightened and it is quite terrifying. Economic motivated inter-state travels have equally reduced drastically due to increasing armed robbery and activities of bandits on major highways across the country, while fears of going to farmland has reportedly engulfed farmers. People are still being unjustly slaughtered by others, and all that the Federal and State governments do most times is to comment and look on like every other Nigerian. Such incompetent response to ugly national incidents, only point to one thing; and that is national food shortage that has the propensity to worsen the existing and deteriorating state of the economy, poverty and hunger in the country.

5. A compromised electoral system: An economy is built by a transparent system of transition in the leadership of a country. The period of election in any nation, is also a time to build the economy. Where the electoral umpire is compromised and people with economic ideas are not given the opportunity to serve or utilize such ideas, it constitutes an economic problem on the long run. This is a problem in Nigeria, as people with economic prowess are tactically kept far from governance through the cabalistic and cunning decision of the electoral umpire (INEC). There is a relationship between the economy and the electoral system, that is why it is important for competent people to be in government and the scheme of things and citizens and electorates need to be educated or kept abreast of this relationship.

6. Lack of economic policy direction and timely implementation of the nation's budget: Lack of a robust economic policy direction on the part of government, also contribute to economic decline. A good system of administration or government usually looks up for direction. This also gives focus to the implementation of formulated policies. Absence of a robust economic policy would halt economic activities, scare investors, affect the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the Gross National Product (GNP), Per Capita income, increase inflationary trend, interest rate, exchange rate, balance of trade and balance of payment. In Nigeria, at the moment, there is no holistic economic policy direction of government other than "fighting corruption." Even when money is recovered from looters of the economy and is reported in the media, it is usually

misappropriated again, by the powers that be. For instance, the huge amount of money that the past administration realized from corruption-related issues would have been enough to stabilize the economy but nothing was done to revamp it. The media reports about the recovered money were just seen as fictions of imagination by the public.

### **SBCC and the Nigerian Economy**

A deep look into the problems of the Nigerian economy shows that it is attitudinal or behavioural which needs a holistic approach for a positive change. Therefore, Social and Behavioural Change Communication (SBCC) or development communication is the vehicle that would drive that change. According to Iyorza (2015) and Conradi and Sánchez-Moyano, (2022) Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) is designed as the art and practice of informing, influencing and motivating individuals, communities, institutions and public audiences about important health and development issues. The field uses measurable objectives and evaluation methods and is fed by multiple disciplines. It seeks to consciously address social factors that influence behaviour and development within a socio-ecological framework. Although change starts with an individual, it has to be manifested in social norms, groups, policies or structure in order to be sustainable. This is achieved through communication oriented towards advocacy in political and cultural domain, social and community mobilization to expand participation, foster collaboration and communication in relation to individual risk and vulnerability.

### **What can SBCC contribute to the Nigerian economy?**

SBCC will liberate Nigeria from negative economic practices by reinforcing positive behaviours of not craving too much for foreign products which is the status quo. This is because the problem of the Nigerian economy and political system, stemmed from wrong attitude towards things. Economics as a field of study, is a social and behavioural science. Therefore, its problems are solved by correcting behaviours and adopting the right attitude to work. In this case, SBCC will help the country to develop local contents by deciding or answering the following basic economic questions:

1) What to produce? The first central problem of an economy is to decide what goods and services are to be produced and in what quantities. This involves allocation of scarce resources in relation to the composition of total output in the economy. Production is the creation of utility. It is the process by which goods and commodities are produced for selling in the market, and for consumption by the individuals. In economics, when inputs (raw materials) are converted into outputs (finished goods), it is also called production. Since resources are scarce, communication (SBCC) messages are to be designed to inform the society on what to produce in order to put the nation on the world economic map. Some of the economic resources which Nigeria is known and recognized for, by the First World or developed countries, are now being produced and marketed in large quantities by other countries, making Nigeria to lose her position in the world market. So, Nigeria must think of what to produce for the world market with her raw materials, not just consuming what is processed from her raw materials.

2) How to produce? The next basic problem of an economy is to decide about the techniques or methods to be used in order to produce the required goods. This problem is primarily dependent upon the availability of resources within the economy. Nigeria is yet to realize how to produce and manage the resources available in the country. For instance, the moribund nature of the refineries in Nigeria is a problem to the availability and marketing of petroleum products in the country and people in the political class must stop gambling with the issue. Media and communication experts, over the years, have set agenda on this issue but to no avail and are still discussing the issue.

3) For whom to produce? The third basic problem to be decided is the allocation of goods among the members of the society. What is lacking in the world market or economic gap that Nigeria can bridge? The country is known for consumption and importation of even the commonest goods without producing anything to compensate for importation and contribute to the availability of goods in the world market. Nigeria imports a lot from China. What can she produce to attract China's Patronage? Media discussions and talks on the decision of what country or countries should Nigeria service with her mineral resources and be paid for that,



maximally, have not been considered. Okoye (2021) posited that Nigeria must change its ugly fate from a major consumer of imports to a renowned industrial hub and exporter of locally manufactured goods, if its economic development efforts are to be achieved within a short time span and sustained over a long period of time.

### **Social Behavioural Change Communication (SBCC) and Economic Sustainability: Striking a Balance between Production and Consumption**

Despite Nigeria's economic feat as the largest economy in Africa with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of US \$397 billion accounting for 17 per cent of the continent's GDP- \$2.33 trillion and huge manpower resource as the biggest Black Nation in the world, as projected in the media, the country is still in economic doom (Borden, Cohn & Gooderham, 2018; Okoye, 2021). So, the need to rescue, recover and sustain the economy of Nigeria cannot be overemphasized.

Ejim (2023) added that the nexus between development communication and economic sustainability and national development lies in the function of the media as a tool for the dissemination of information regarding political reforms and policies aimed at economic sustainability. In this sense, the media serves as a liaison between the policy makers and the citizens, or as a conduit for the education of the people regarding new laws and their roles in nation building. Put more succinctly, SBCC can be used to sustain the Nigerian dwindling economy through the following ways or approaches:

1. Development communication: Development communication is a powerful catalyst of economic sustainability. Without such communication, there can be no meaningful economic development in the society. Nweze (2019) opined that in the current era of information and communication economy, no society will achieve maximum economic progress without proper application of development communication in the societal development process. In other words, economic development programmes or policies depend on sound development communication framework to excel. This implies that communication messages should be tailored to provide path ways for development of the economy and the public made to have perception of development in what is consumed from the media. Wilson (2017) opines that development should mean the

application of new (developmental) ideas to solve practical problems through a strong desire to dare, to make sacrifices and be the change we need. The author further added that national economic liberation and development are goals that only communication can help achieve when employed responsibly and targeted towards national objectives.

2. Promotion of national unity and identity: The effort of behaviour change communicators or development communicators should not be partisan but strengthening of bonds between the government and the governed (citizens). This dual cooperation will lead to economic sustainability. Moghalu (2023) opined that Nigeria cannot become a wealthy, prosperous country without first becoming a nation with a shared sense of national identity and unity of purpose, even in her diversity. Development begins in the mind. When people agree on a common goal of prosperity, based on an inclusive sense of national identity, shared values, justice and equality before the law; they can collectively put their shoulders to the wheel and push in unison. This characteristic, sometimes described as “social cohesion”, can have a transformative impact in terms of productivity. Because Nigeria has been fractured along ethnic and religious lines of primordial identity, its politics reflects this fractionalization. Electoral outcomes create “Governments of Nigeria” that frequently (mis)manage the economy not for purposes of real wealth creation, but for that of advancing group vested interests of class, ethnicity, religion, or partisan political affiliation. In essence, then, what passes for economic management has become mostly a “rewards” system for chosen cronies of multiple hues. A national economy managed in this manner, rather than on the basis of technocratic competence, cannot create the wealth of nations, hence, the employment of development communication.

3. Building democratic institutions that work: Development communication and SBCC can be used to build democratic institutions that drive economic sustainability. Without strong, independent institutions to uphold accountability and the rule of law, and to regulate the economy to create a level playing field for market players, a national economy cannot thrive. Institutions need to be independent precisely so that they can work for the citizens and the economy broadly, and not for cabals or for partisan political interests. Where the latter is the case, the economy

suffers because it weakens investor confidence, reduces both foreign and local investment, and promotes capital flight. But again, institutions also cannot be strong, especially in an economy such as Nigeria, without strong, competent individuals leading the process.

4. Creation of corruption-free business friendly secured environment: The content of development communication at this juncture, should promote national security for the purpose of economic sustainability. Bopp, Sims, Matthews, Rovniak, Poole and Colgan, (2018) observed that while the need to reposition Nigeria properly for effective private sector participation towards creating the badly needed young-to-grow industries and jobs in the country is urgent and imminent, it appears the previous administration has thrown its full weight on pursuit of foreign loans and execution of purported capital projects of little economic significance to the present fate of the country. SBCC can address this ugly trend and the new administration to create a favorable environment for business and economic growth and sustainability.

1. Diversification of the economy: A dwindling economy cannot be boosted and sustained, if it is still based on a single source of capital revenue generation like dependence on crude oil. Development communication has the potency of being used to diversify the economy and position it for growth. The economy should be diversified into agriculture for the purpose of production and creation of utility, using agricultural communication. Nigeria was the biggest exporter of palm oil produce before now, Malaysia, for instance came to Nigeria for it, but today; they are the world largest exporter of the product. There is an avalanche of agricultural potentials that are yet to be explored which will boost the Nigerian economy and the media can harness these potentials.

## **Conclusion**

The role of development communication for sustainable economy in any nation cannot be overemphasized. Although the function of communication generally is to create shared meaning and exchange of ideas as well as information, the essence of every positive communication is to promote development in the society. In recent times, the crisis rocking the Nigerian economy and rising inflation amidst insecurity, calls for a holistic approach from the perspective of social and behavioural change communication (SBCC) to address the problem. This paper has explored the

nexus between SBCC and economic sustainability with the aim of striking a balance between production and consumption economic practices amongst Nigerians. The discourse concluded that for economic sustainability to be achieved in Nigeria, development communication or SBCC must be used to build vital institutions and social structures that promote production economy than consumption economy in all sectors.

### **Recommendation for policy directions**

The paper recommended that:

- a. there is every need for the urgent adoption of behavioural change communication approaches to strike a balance between creating the enabling environment for Nigerian's economy to move from consumption to production economy.
- b. Political actors and policy makers in Nigeria should utilize the development communication approach to answer economic questions in order to shift from consumption to production so as to boost the dwindling economy of Nigeria; and government at all levels should create a synergy with development communicators to arrest some of the factors hindering the growth of the Nigerian economy.
- c. There should be the urgent overhauling of Nigerian economic policies to be in line with current global best practices to move Nigeria to the committee of production economy where the country can compete favourably well amongst committee of nations.
- d. Besides, Nigeria has all the raw materials including human resources and capital that it can produce every goods for exports, why limiting ourselves?

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