CROSS CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND COMMUNICATION: THE SYNERGY AND COOPERATION BETWEEN BORDER COMMUNITIES

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Abstract
This article explores the importance of cross-cultural understanding and communication in promoting inter-ethnic and cross-border co-operation, community development and in harmonizing government policies to support the process of African integration. The presentation is in three parts. The first deals with the explanation of the key concepts. The second part identifies the areas of possible cooperation and collaboration between and among border communities. The last part explains how shared or cross-cultural values and effective communication can be harnessed to promote understanding and cooperation between and among border communities. In concrete terms, the paper recommends the establishment of cross-border dialogue frameworks to widen the interpersonal channels crucial for forming or changing attitudes towards new ideas and the setting up of community radio and television stations in selected borderlands to create awareness of government policies and actions.
Key-Words: Communication, Cross-culture, Border communities, Synergy

Cet article explore l'importance de la compréhension et de la communication interculturelles dans la promotion de la coopération interethnique et transfront-alière, du développement communautaire et de l'harmonisation des politiques gouvernementales pour soutenir le processus d'intégration africaine. La présen-tation se fait en trois parties. La première traite l'explication des concepts clés. La deuxième partie identifie les domaines de coopération et de collaboration possibles entre les communautés frontalières. La dernière partie explique comment les valeurs partagées ou interculturelles et une communication efficace peuvent être exploitées pour promouvoir la compréhension et la coopération entre les communautés frontalières. Concrètement, le document recommande la mise en place de cadres de dialogue transfrontalier pour élargir les canaux interpersonnels essentiels à la formation ou au changement d'attitudes à l'égard des nouvelles idées et la création de stations de radio et de télévision communautaires dans certaines zones frontalières afin de sensibiliser aux politiques et actions gouverne-mentales.
Mot-clés : Communication, Culture croisée, Communautés frontalières, Synergie

Introduction

It is important to begin this essay with the explanation of the key concepts because the content of this articles revolves around them. The word communication is derived from the Latin *communicare* meaning to share and from the French *communis,* which can be translated as common. It generally refers to the process of sharing information, thoughts and feelings through writing, verbal or other forms[1] Communication is a means of connecting people and places. Although several scholars have posited different models of communication, the essential elements of communication are the sender, message, channel/medium, the receiver and feedback[2]. Communication can be downward (from a superior to a subordinate), up ward (from a subordinate to a superior) or horizontal (between people of the same status). Experts in communication studies have also stressed that the goals of effective communication include creating a common perception, changing behavior and acquiring information[3].

Hence, communication is an important component of the process of change and development. Floyd Shoemaker and Evereth Rogers underscored this point when they argued that while mass media are effective in creating knowledge of change and innovations, inter-personal channels are more important in forming and changing attitudes towards new ideas[4]. Benjamin Disraeli, the Prime Minister of Britain from 1874 to 1880, expressed the same point succinctly when he said, "with words we govern men"[5] .

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[1] See Everest M. Rogers and F. Floyd Shoemakers *Communication of inventions: A cross cultural Approach.* The free press, 2nd edition, Collies Macmillan Publishers, Larder, p11, Herta A Murphy and Herbert W. Hildebrandt, *Effective Business Communications,* 5th edition, Mc Graw-hill book company, New York 1988 p4.

[2] See Murphy and Hildebrandt, *Effective Business Communications of Innovations,* p.11

[3] Barbara Brown, "what is *Effective Communication?*" http//www. livestong.com/article 690309-effective communication p.39 accessed on 3/11/13.

[4] Rogers and shoemaker, *Communication of Innovations,* p. 39

[5] Cited in Francis J. Bergin, *Practical Communication,* Pitman Press, bath Greek Britain, 1981. P1.

The concept of cross-culture generally conveys the idea of cultural interactivity, something relating to or involving two or more diffe-rent cultures or countries. The origin of the use of the term can be traced to the 1930s, but it became prevalent in the 1980s. Although many people use multiculturalism interchangeably with cross culturalism, there is a major difference between the two. Whereas multiculturalism deals with cultural diversity within a particular nation or social groups, cross culturalism is concerned with exchange or interaction beyond the boundaries of the nation or cultural group[6].

On the other hand, border communities refer to people living close to the international boundaries, in other words in borderlands. They are people whose lives are directly impacted by the localized effects of the border. For administrative purpose, it has been suggested that people who live within 20-25 kilometers of the border, on both sides, should be regarded as border communities[7]. Irrespective of how the borderland is delineated, the borderland is usually a zone of culture overlap. It is where one culture fades imperceptibly into another. Hence, the logic of describing the borderland or border community as a cross-culture area. Even where a homogenous group, like the Hausa or Yoruba, had been bisected by the international boundary, the two parts would have been socialized into the cultures and value systems of the different colonial masters.[8]

Besides, the shared experience of the groups in their independent countries has generally helped to form new identities that take the boundary as the starting point[9]. The policy of exclusion is further

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[6] See the Thesaurus for the distinction between the cross culturalism and multiculturalism.

[7] For instance, in the America/Mexico border, the effect of the border is felt far beyond 25 kilometers.

[8] See A. I. Asiwaju, Western Yorubaland Under Colonial Rule, 1889-1945, Longman, 1976; see also A. I. Asiwaju, *West Africa Transformation: comparative impacts of French and British colonialism*, Lagos, malthouse press, Ltd, 2001

[9] It is the border that indirectly determines our nationality, our law, currency and

reinforced by the nation – state approach to development in the different African countries. The net effect of all these is that the international boundaries have served mainly as lines of exclusion rather than points of contact. While the border communities are generally marginalized in the distribution of government institutions and amenities, the barrier effect of the borders obstruct rational planning and harmonization of policies at the local, national and international levels. Roads, electricity projects, education and health institutions, and industries are seldom planned in a way that could benefit the communities on both sides of the border. This lack of synergy leads to unnecessary duplication of efforts and high overhead cost.

The concept of synergy implies the idea of working together to attain goals and objectives that would have been elusive if the groups concerned had chosen to do the same work separately. Two horses yoked together would pull a higher load than the sum total of their separate efforts. The crucial question is, how can cross cultural understanding and communication help to promote synergy and development between border communities?

Identification of Areas of Cooperation: The main problem of the border communities originates from their geographical location that is far from the center of the state and the barrier effects of the borders that have prevented them from relating with their neighbours to find common solution to common problems and similarly prevented the governments from planning beyond the boundaries of the State. The current emphasis on regional integration as a necessary step to development in this age of globalization renders the nation-state approach to border governance obsolete. There are several areas in which the border communities can cooperate to speed up the development of the border regions and contribute meaningfully to the goals of African integration. These include provision of security, whether in form of community policing or joint patrols, construction

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national policies. In other words, sovereignty starts and ends at the border.

of roads and telecommunication networks, in the areas of education and health, encouraging the flow of trade by providing capital for border markets and strengthening the production and distribution chains. The cooperation could involve joint actions of community leaders and government officials on both sides of the border. Government involvement is crucial, especially in providing the legal instruments and institutional frameworks for cross border projects. It is also important to add that cooperation can be voluntary, coerced or unintentional. Better results can be expected when the process of cooperation is both voluntary and intentional. The process of communication could determine whether the process of cooperation will be voluntary or coerced. Trevelyan Macaulay, a notable social historian hit the nail on the head when he remarked that "men are never so likely to settle a question rightly as when they discuss it freely"[10].

Cross cultural understanding and communication as tools of cooperation and synergy: The potentials of using cross cultural understanding and communication as tools for cooperation and synergy in border communities are high. Several aspects of this will be highlighted.

Informal links: Border communities have always ignored policies that tend to confine them to one side of the border. In fact, they interact more frequently with their neighbours across the border than with their fellow citizens at the core of the State. To begin with, many of them have kinsmen just across the border. For instance, there is a dynamic relationship between the Egun of Badagry in Nigeria and their kinsmen in the Republic of Benin. The same is true of the Hausa, Fulani, Efik and other groups fragmented by the international boundaries in Nigeria[11]. Apart from the factor of kinship affinity,

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[10] Cited in Francis J. Bergin *Practical Communication,* p 74
[11] See A. I. Asiwaju *Partitioned Africans: Ethnic Relations Across Africa's International Boundaries, 1884-1984.* (Hurst & Coy London and University of Lagos Press, Lagos, 1984).

people who live in borderlands are always quick to borrow elements of culture that are critical to their survival. Many of them are bilingual and have developed a network of informal links, including informal or parallel trade that requires some level of official recognition if the goal of regional integration is to be achieved.

While it is true that these informal links already create a platform for cooperation between border communities, the process can be enhanced by institutionalizing a framework for cross-border dialogue that will permit border communities to hold neighborhood meetings to discuss common problems.

Language policies: Communication is important to all human beings. Indeed, the ability to reason and communicate is what distinguishes man from the other creations. Incidentally, this factor has not been sufficiently appreciated by the Nigerian government in the dissemination of information to the grassroots. For instance, much of the anxiety expressed by the Bakassi indigenes would have been avoided if the Green Tree Agreement had been translated into Efik and other local languages spoken along the border. A good policy that is handed down from the top, without adequate information to the beneficiaries, could be easily misunderstood or resisted. It can be likened to a good gift that is nicely packaged but sent to a wrong address. This is one major area that the government and policy makers need to address.

The second aspect of the language question relates to the official status of the French language in Nigeria. Nigeria is surrounded by Francophone countries that has French as their national official language. But while these francophone countries teach English as a compulsory subject, at least in the Junior Schools, Nigeria is yet to adopt the same approach with regards to French. This has limited the interaction of Nigerians across the border. It is therefore suggested that the Nigerian Federal Government should introduce the study of French as a compulsory course in the Junior schools.

Border Mass media: As earlier noted, the goals of effective communication include creating a common perception, changing behaviors and acquiring information. Communication is very vital to the process of change and development. This is why Rogers and Shoemaker argued that "Although communication and social change are not synonymous, communication is an important element throughout the social change process"[12]. As of now, many border communities do not receive radio and television messages from their states and are, therefore, largely ignorant of the policies and actions of their governments[13].

The only way to remedy the situation is to create a network of radio stations and television in targeted border communities to fill the gap. This was done to support the Cross-Border-Area pilot project in Mali. Mali is surrounded by the African countries of Cote d'ivoire, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Guinea, Algeria and Niger. Apart from the perennial struggle over access to water bodies that is common with countries located in savannah or arid regions, Mali and her neighbours also experienced discontinuities associated with the dysfunctional effect of the international boundaries. The desire to overcome the barrier effects of the borders through rational planning and harmonization of policies – in culture, education, health, sport etc.- led to the Sikasso Seminar of 2002 where these neighbouring countries decided to treat their borderland as a coherent unit for the purpose of planning and development[14]. The realization that the goal would remain elusive

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[12] Rogers and Shoemaker, *Communication of Innovations,* p.12.

[13] This was one of the observations of Colonies Ahmed M. Daku when he was Governor of Sokoto state. See Ahmed M. Daku, "Provision of facilities and Amenities to Towns and Villages within Sokoto State Located Along Nigeria's International Borders" in A. I. Asiwaju (ed.) *Development of Border Regions,* Revised Edition, African University Institute, Imeko, (first published by National Boundary Commission, 1993), p. 175.

[14] See A. S. Diarrah "The concept of the "Cross-Border Area" in the West African Sub-regional Integration Process: Results of the Sikasso Seminar", in R. T. Akinyele, *Borderlands and African Integration*, Panaf publishing Inc., Lagos, 2008

without mass mobilization and adequate information resulted in the decision to set up a network of radio stations in the SKBO border area: Sikasso (Mali) – Korgho (Cote d'ivoire) – Bobo Dioulasso (Burkina – Faso) in 2005. The main objective of the network, according to official document, is "the joint production of programmes that would be broadcast on community radio stations within the SKBO space and whose local information mission of promoting regional integration is of key importance in cross-border cooperation"[15].

On the other hand, there are a few border communities or local governments that are lucky enough to have radio or television statins sited within their territories. For instance, there is an F.M. radio station in Imeko in the Imeko-Afon local Government of Ogun state. Across the border is the Alaketou Television in Cotonou in the Republic of Benin[16].

Again, Nigeria and her neigbhours can borrow a leaf from the cross-border mass media project in the cross boder area of Kosovo, Serbia and Macedonia of 2004. The project area covered the four municipalities in Kosovo, Serbia and Macedonia. The following media were involved; T. V. vali and T. V. plus from Gjilan/Gnjilane, R.T.V. Presevo of Presevo, T.V. Fiesta, T.V. Hana, Radio Bravo and Radio Albana of Kumanova, and Radio Gong of Trgoviste. The result of the survey carried out showed that the radio coverage reached 803, 281 inhabitants (9% Macedonia) 13.5% Serbs, 77.5% Albanian). While the T.V. reached approximately 550, 930 inhabi-tants made up of 12.8% Macedonians, 8.4% Serbs and 78.8% Albanians. Within these territories, the population can received channels transmitted both terrestrially and through cable operators. As a first step in the

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pp 15-20 for details.

[15] See Guy-Michel Bolouvi and Edmond Sougue, Kurumba: Creation of a Cross-Border Networks of Radio Stations following to the workshop launching a cross-border cooperation pilot operation Sikasso (Mali), 27, 28 et 29 September, 2005. Sahel and West Africa Club, WABI/DT/32/06; October 2006.

[16] I am grateful to Profesor A. I. Asiwaju for this information.

implementation of a number of joint productions and capacity building, the consultants who carried out the survey recommended the setting up of a joint venture company that would centralize the marketing operations of these media houses over a long period[17]. Nigeria and her neighbours should similarly explore how to use the media on both sides of the border to reach out to the border communities. Of course, there are several challenges to cross border media. These includes:

(a) Language barrier-French and English are official languages spoken on the sides of the borders. But important news items can be broadcast in French and English.

(b) Administrative and Legislative problems- The media houses operate within different legislative frameworks and media laws in the francophone countries may not be as flexible as in Nigeria.

(c) Different technical capacities- This may be an obstacle to joint production operations. The radio and television stations may, therefore, provide complementary services.

(d) Lack of electricity – This may affect the accessibility in many border communities.

(e) Political instability and pollical ties of some media houses – several medial houses are established to articulate the political vies of politicians. This may limit their usefulness.

In spite of all these, the advantage cross border media cannot be over emphasized as a tool for mass mobilization. This is why governments and policy makers should encourage the establishment of radio and television stations among border communities.

Proposals for creating cross border media: First, Government should undertake the need assessment of the border communities with

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[17] Sec Cross-Border Media: fostering sustainable inter-ethnic and cross-border co-operation for peace building and community development. "The cross-border media co-operation channel experiment" Cross-Broder Diaries, No. 7 September 2007, pp 9-11 for details.

a view to identifying where radio or television stations should be sited. This should be done in collaboration with the governments or relevant authorities on the other side of the border. Private investors should also be encouraged to invest in cross-border media.

Second, targeted media houses on both side of the border should be encouraged to begin with news exchange on regular basis. This can be done at little or no cost. Emphasis should be placed on local issues and government policies that directly affect the border communities.

Third, as a second step in the exchange programme, there could be joint production of programmes.

Fourth, after a while, there should be joint training of staff and harmonization of programmes.

In conclusion, the major submission of this article is that the development of African borderlands as well as the objectives of Africa integration cannot be realized until conscious efforts are made to promote cross-border communication and understanding.