Communication and Harmony: Tradomedia and its Effects on Social Change in Developing Nations

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Abstract: Communication gap has been recognized globally to be one of the major grounds where disharmony sprouts. This further indicates that there are idiosyncratic communication methods particular to each community for effective communication. In other words, culture determines the relationship of what is said to what is meant, for example when "no" means "may be" and "tomorrow" means "never." It also determines the timing of interpersonal events, the appropriate place and tone for discussion of particular topics, as well as physical distance to be maintained between one speaker and another.

In developing nations like Nigeria, rural dwellers mainly use their tradomedia to communicate effectively with one another. They are the *people's media* and their *orature.* The latter is the oral equivalent of their literature, which is not stored anywhere except in their collective memories. It thus becomes necessary for anyone who wants to effectively evoke harmonious participation of the *ruralites* in any development program to adopt the use of the tradomedia. Studies in the diffusion of innovation and the two-step flow of information have confirmed this. Non- adoption of tradomedia in the implementation of government policies targeted at rural development in the Niger Delta has been chaotic and futile.

A rural community, Ibusa in Delta State was studied to investigate the effectiveness of tradomedia messages in provoking the harmonious participation of the indigenes in the government sponsored Poverty Alleviation Program (P.A.P.).

This study revealed that tradomedia is more effective than the mass media in provoking audience harmonious participation in Ibusa.

Keywords: Tradomedia, Ruralites, Mass media.

Introduction

The flaws of the almighty media of communication is become more glaring in its consistent failed efforts to effectively evoke the interest and participation of ruralites during the implementation of most socioeconomic and developmental policies in Nigeria. Nigeria, in the 1960s and 1970s, enjoyed steady economic growth and relative stability. The economy and the income per capita grew steadily and few people were living below the poverty line, because the industrial and public sectors absorbed most labor forces. From the 1970s to the 1980s, the economy had to contend with severe economic difficulties resulting form the oil shocks, world recession, deteriorating terms of trade, debt overhand, and macroeconomic imbalances. Consequently, the proportion of people living below poverty line rose to 61%.

The Federal Government, in a bid to ameliorate the situation, shifted public expenditure towards poverty alleviation. The different Poverty Alleviation Programmes and Project executed to cushion the effects were Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Better Life Programme (BLP), Family Support Programme (FSP), and National Directorate of Employment (NDE), among others. However, all of these programs, according to central bank of Nigeria (CBN) rating, failed due to poor implementation and the non-involvement of the supposed beneficiaries. Consequently, the preceding administration at inception in 1999 launched another Poverty Alleviation program within the framework of budget 2000. The program was designed to provide employment for 200,000 people, and the sum of 10 billion Naira was set-aside for it. The program was implemented in every state of the Federation. However the undoing of the former programs also bedeviled the latter. The majority of supposed beneficiaries (ruralites*)* were again left out.

It is on this note, that the researcher decided to find out why rural participation in government programs are poor; substantiate on the need for all policy implementers to have an understanding of the most appropriate mode of communicating to their target rural communities so as to avoid chaos and disharmony in those areas; verify if the communication channel employed for each rural community makes indigenes either respond supportively or deleteriously; ascertain the reason(s) why the media has a hiccup in provoking the harmonious participation of the ruralites in the government sponsored Poverty Alleviation Program (P.A.P.); assess if the channel of communication employed by the government makes its messages more effective or ineffective; ascertain whether the government makes use of tradomedia; and discuss that the tradomedia may be more effective in the spreading of government programs in rural areas.

A rural community, Ibusa, made up of 10 major quarters (namely *Umueze, Ogboli, Ezukwu, Umuodafe, Ogbe-owelle, Umuisagba, Umuekea, Imidi, Achalla, and Umuogwo)* in Delta State, Nigeria, was studied to

investigate all of the preceding objectives. The theoretical framework used is the individual difference and the symmetry theory which explains why the *ruralites* reaction to modern mass media messages differs from their reaction and response to tradomedia messages.

At present, traditional media of communication have little literature. This could be as a result of the little or no attention paid to this important area by most communication scholars. It could also be as a result of earlier communication scholars seeing the informal, traditional channels of communication as being inefficient, ineffective and non-systematic. Despite this low and absent priority given to them in official circles, tradomedia have passed on from one generation to another. They are part of the people's way of life. In the communal society, the tradomedia are the most used channels of communication. They are rooted in culture. Culture is the aggregate of a people's existence: their taboos, mores, and social conduct. This means that tradomedia speaks a silent language about the various communities and their people. As Ikpe (1990) points out "culture is a foundation for the content of communication while idioms, proverbs, riddles and other elements of our language helps to shape our thoughts, experiences and world view"[15] . Culture amongst the ruralites is held in high esteem.

African people in spite of their great linguistics and ethnic diversities have been communicating among themselves in a wide variety of ways for a long time. In fact, the sheer range and wide variety of human or interpersonal communication on that immense continent, according to Hatchan (1971) offers a challenge to contemporary communication scholars. Hunsponu-Usu (1977) says the Nigerian culture is largely non-literary. It thus suffices to mention that this oral tradition among the ruralites is still strong and the people are more easily reached through oral forms of communication, such as speeches from their opinion leaders, than through written words. Traditional cultures, such as symbolic visual, verbal association, or a combination of both, are widely accepted more than the mass media in these rural communities, which supports the individual difference theory and the symmetry theory and reveals the reason why ruralites react differently to messages from the mass media and tradomedia.

They believe more in information passed on through the town crier form, the king, traditional festivals, plays, puppet shows, dance, songs, storytelling, poetry, debates, the opinion leaders' forum, parades, rituals, and carnivals. The most credible are the gods (*ndi nnmo*); whatever they say to the rural leaders is "final" no matter whose ox is gored.

The reason for these could be because the traditional African societies are mostly communal or folk societies. In a folk society, prominence is placed on mystical, group, and face-to-face interaction. The characteristics of the folk society, according to Redfield (1941) include a small community of people where everyone knows every other person, social control is largely exercised through folk ways or enforced by the informal pressure of the community, an extreme sense of unity binds the community together, and the community is economically self sufficient. The chief priest (*ohene*) knows every family. Thus, the best communication mechanism in the rural areas that is likely to foster greater unity is the informal type of communication.

Ugboajah (1979) observes the stability amongst the Igbos in South Eastern Nigeria. He attributes this to their system of tribal government, which fosters considerable informal communication. This is made possible through group systems or village social structures: titled and secret societies, exogamous marriage structure, and cult oracle.

Discussing the flow of information and influence from the government to the traditional society, the largely used formal mass media, as mentioned, is not so effective in the rural areas. As a remedy the traditional media ought to be geared into action, because they become the appropriate and useful communication means for further transmission of messages.

Ugboajah (1982) thus notes here:

> One observes at once that the formal media become less used immediately after communication or information reaches the traditional authority usually represented by a King or a Chief or a Council of Elders in other respects. Communication from that function takes a diffusion approach and is dominated by the informal or oral media (tradomedia).[29]

The five major traditional communication channels include opinion\leaders, town crier, dance/festivals, folklores, age grade meetings and ritual sacrifices.

Town crier

The most effective traditional medium is the town crier or village gong man who is also known as the king's or village messenger. He disseminates messages and brings back responses. A very important yardstick for measuring the village gong man and the believability of his messages is his source's credibility. Aspects of source credibility, according to McGroskey, Larson, and Knapp (1971) are competence, character, intention, personality, and dynamism. For the persuasive communicator to have any desired influence on his audience, his creditability must be high. Thus messages transmitted by the town crier usually originate from the authoritative sources in the village. These sources include the Emir, and powerful heads, in Northern Nigeria; the *Oba* or

Baale in South/Western Nigeria; the Chiefs, Council of Elders, or Age grades with delegated powers in the South Eastern parts of Nigeria. The messages are influenced by these powerful authoritative sources, which Wilson (1990) refers to as the "gate keepers." In talking about traditional institutions of communication, he wrote, "Mass communication instruments in rural areas have their specific functions, and these depend on the type of information that the gatekeeper wants the public to know" (Wilson, 1990).

Nwuneli (1983) says the job of the town crier is the same, irrespective of the village he is from. The Igbos for example call him "*otiekwe*," the Hausa call him "*sankira*," and the Yoruba call him, "*gboun-gboun*." However, their choice for further communication of the message may vary. For example, where death has occurred, some villages may use gunshots while some others may use drums, and yet some a combination of the two. In the Ibusa community three gunshots at 3 a.m. indicates that someone has just been buried. A combination of the town criers announcement and a sudden clearing of the surrounding weeds around the village by the youths signifies that nobody should go the farm on that day. It also signifies that the *Ifejioku* festival will soon commence.

Among the Tivs of Northern Nigeria, the *indyer* drum is used for further transmission of messages. The drum is carved entirely out of wood. Messages transmitted with this drum include those associated with wars, disasters, deaths of very important personalities in the community, and other related issues. The *indyer* indicates the name, personality, and rank of the deceased. A drum that performs similar functions as the Tiv's is the *Ikolo* drum, popular amongst the Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria.

Nwuneli (1983) observes that:

> No matter what the situation, the town crier is invariably used as the all purpose general information disseminator. The hardware/channel/instrument the town crier chooses as an attention-gaining medium depends on what the town or village has previously accepted. The choice of channels could vary from the gong of various sizes and shapes to bells and drums" [17]

In the drawing analogies between the town crier and the modern mass media, the village gong man is the "well known and most useful broadcaster of news in the rural areas."

Folklores

Folklores are synonymous with the people's cultures, history, and way life. They are very important aspects of traditional communication. Alto Jablow (1961), an American based writer, notes that: "In the very being of African people, rooted in their long tradition and still an intimate part of their lives to this day, are the marvelous unwritten tales, acted out round the fire at night[8].

Folklores are the stories or tales that are told in the village and rural areas, having their roots in the people's tradition and way of life. Folklore can be equated to modern documentaries that teach lessons and reveal history. The stories, mostly narrated at night under moonlight or around the fire, are useful because of their moral teachings and values. The folktales usually incorporate songs, proverbs, and demonstrations. In Ibusa, the elders (*diokpas*) who tell the stories incorporate external messages that come to them into the folklores. Audience participation, which is usually very high, is an important part of African folklores.

The use of proverbs is also very common. Proverbs are short, witty, and logical statements that contain general truths. Most village elders use them to drive home their points or buttress their arguments and debates. Proverbs are also used for moral education, to clarify complex issues, or send esoteric and confidential messages among the people. These messages are lost to the non-initiates.

Akpan (1990) found, in the case study of the Erian village, that proverb usage is common among elderly persons. According to him, proverbs can be said to be a restrictive form of communication because it is only the people who share the common frame of reference that can decode their message. In Ibusa, the use of proverbs adds weight to the information making it more believable. In the words of one of the elders (*diokpas*), "*Atutu inu ni ifanekwu netinye okwu ugwu na ru*," which means "The presence of proverbs during a speech increases the credibility and importance of the message being disseminated."

Folk Dance

Folk dance is another popular channel of traditional communication in the rural areas. Dance is the movement of the body in a rhythmical way, usually to the sound of music. One can dance with a partner, with a group, or alone. People dance in order to release the emotions stimulated by music. They dance for joy, or for other reasons. In the rural areas many of the dances are connected with the ceremonies of birth, death, marriage, initiation into adulthood, traditional worship of gods, and so on.

In Africa, the rhythm of the movement is the most important feature in dance, and a dance may have several rhythms following each other. The rhythms are highly developed and complicated too. Concerning dance as a form of communication, Kwebene Uketia (1991) notes:

> The dance can also be used as a social and artistic medium of communication. It can convey thought or matters of importance through the choice of movements, postures and facial expression. Through the dance, individuals and social groups can show their reactions to

attitudes of hostility or cooperation and friendship held by others towards them. They can offer respects to their superiors, or appreciation and gratitude to well wishers and benefactors. They can react to the presence of rivals, affirm their status to servants, subjects and others, or express their belief through the choice of appropriate dance vocabulary or symbolic gestures (p. 35).

According to him, when a dancer points the right hand or both hands skywards in the Akan dance in Ghana, he is saying, "I look to God." When he places his right forefinger lightly against his head, he means, "It is a matter for my head, something that I should think myself." If he places his right forefinger below his right eye, he is saying, "I have nothing to say but see how things will go." When he rolls both hands inward and stretches his right arm simultaneously with the last beats of the music, he means, "If you bind me with cords, I shall break them into pieces."

The foregoing has shown clearly the powerful communication attributes that makes dance qualify as a symbolic medium of traditional communication among the people of Africa. In Ibusa an organized dance for visitors (e.g. policy implementers) shows acceptance. This dance is done by the *umuadas* (daughters born in the quarter[s] visited).

Music

When talking about dance as a medium of traditional communication in Nigeria, as well as in other African countries, one should not leave out the role played by music, which usually motivates the dance in the first place. Music, according to the *Africa Encyclopedia*, is "sound that is organized in a particular pattern." Every sound has a pitch ranging between the highest and the lowest. When the pitch is clear and easy to distinguish, the sound can be described as a musical note.

Music forms an integral part of the life of people in Nigeria. Laz Ekwueme (1995) notes in a paper titled, *Music, the Arts and Communication in Africa,* that music is part of an Africans' life from cradle to grave, from womb to tomb. However, the degree to which music is used on occasions varies from community to community, and the occasions vary too.

Respondents

Respondents are indigenes of Ibusa who reside in the village. The population of the village is about 4168 people most of whom are women and youth. Among them 770 males and 950 females were used for the study. The average age of the respondents was 50 ranging from 25 to 75. Most of them including women are basically farmers and traders. About 50% of the study population comprise of illiterates who cannot read, write or comprehend in English. Thirty percent are semi-literates. The remaining 20% are literates. They are basically the younger generation who are in the secondary schools.

Procedure

The research was carried out using a self-administered questionnaire after a pilot study was conducted.

This questionnaire contains 20 close-ended questions and one open-ended question.

The entire town was stratified into 10 according to the 10 existing quarters, and the individual elements were randomly picked until the sample quota was filled. But most the respondents are non-literates. Therefore, as a way of further simplifying the process, those who could not read, write, or understand the English language had the questionnaire read to them in clear "Ibusa Igbo" dialect, and then their responses were objectively ticked appropriately by the researcher/distributors.

The procedure, however, did not prove 100% successful because the researcher/research assistants administered a total of 1,720 questionnaires, but only 1,700 were retrieved and analyzed.

The total responses are expressed in the chart below.

Figure 1: Existence of tradomedia (tm), mass media (mm), and believability in Ibusa
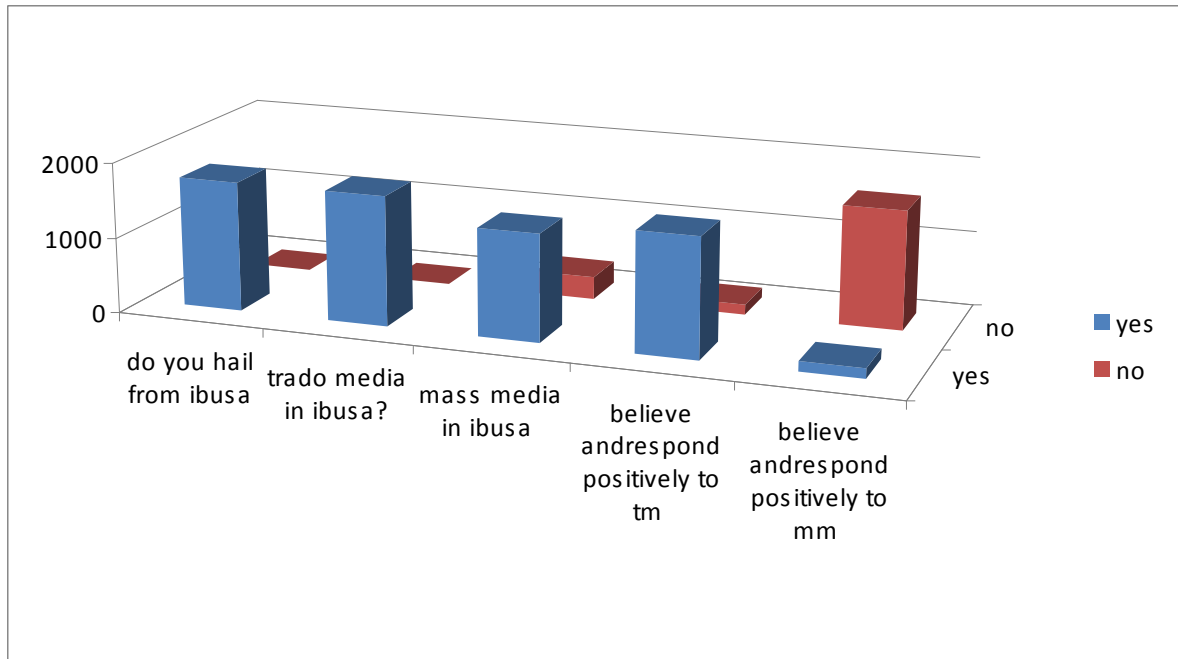
The foregoing indicates that all respondents are Ibusa indigenes and agree to the existence of various traditional media in Ibusa. They give a deleterious approach to any social change message or endeavor that is not emanating from their traditional sources of information which they hold in high esteem.

These traditional sources of information in Ibusa are the opinion leaders, town criers, and the obuzor or the king of Ibusa. Other channels of passing across information are cannon shots, beating of drums, and blowing of elephant tusk. Information may be passed through the Obuzor's palace meeting, age grade meetings, women's dance group meetings, the *eke* market square, during festivals (*iwaji ifejioku ulo and iwu,*), moonlight meetings, or even through the church.

**Figure 2: Media used by policy implementers and Indigenes preferred media**
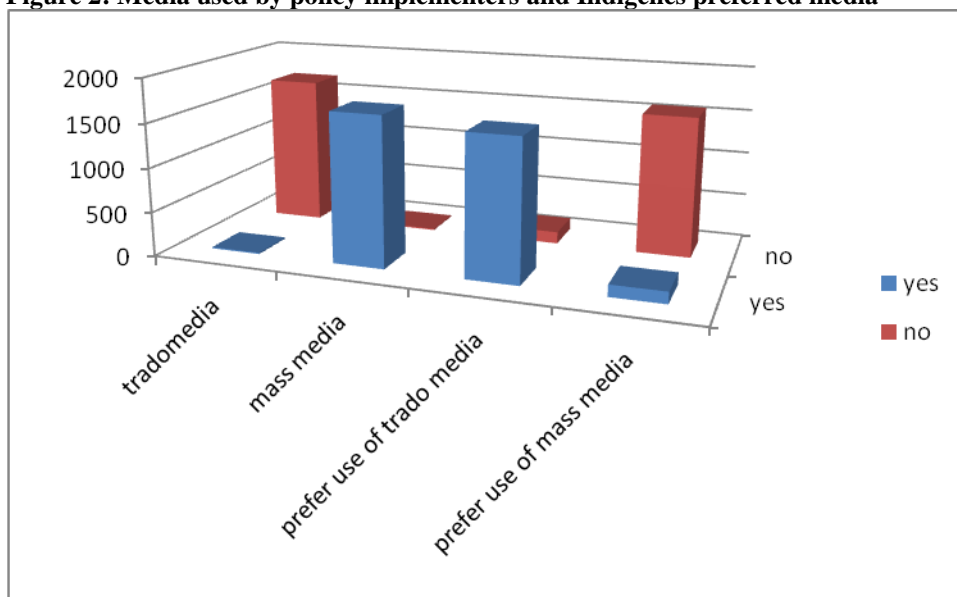
From the analysis above, though the media is said to reach almost everybody in the village, the data in the above figure shows that traditional media of communication is preferred and thus more effective than the mass media in the dissemination and comprehension, as well as evoking the participation, of rural dwellers in government policies and programs. The 1,688 respondents are exposed to TV and radio but 133 indigenes respond to them positively.

Contrary to the influence of the mass media, 1,688 of these ruralites understand and comprehend all information from their traditional media. It also indicates that the respondents would most likely ignore the messages coming from the mass media contrary to their positive when the information comes from their indigenous traditional, media specifically their opinion leader (the *Odoziani* 1 of Ibusa or the *Obuzor* of Ibusa).

Consequently, any government, institution, and non-governmental organizations that intends to enforce social change and development in rural areas should of necessity adopt the traditional media of communication for successful information dissemination and policy/program implementation.

Figure 3: Disharmony in Ibusa
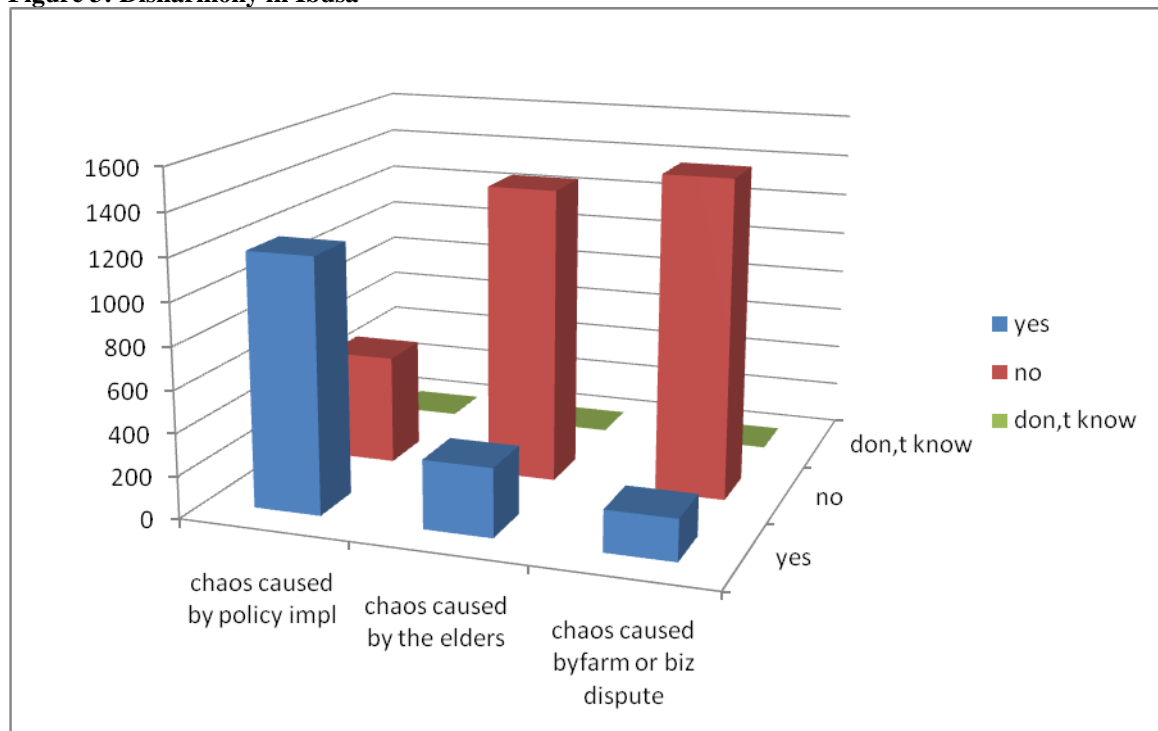
In the course of administering the questionnaires, the elders attested that most of the chaos between the policy implementers and the Ibusa indigenes often sprouts from the manner with which the implementers relate with their women. "No male stranger is permitted to relate to our married women (*ndi inyeme nyi*) at a close range" according to the words of the *Odoziani 1 of Ibusa*. All relation must be through her husband or a female counterpart. The other root of disharmony grows from language usage (where statements like "Can you repeat what you said?" or "Pardon?") is placed on the pedestal of disregard for the elders in council, thus the youth are mobilized to contend with them. Therefore, to ensure that social change takes place harmoniously in Ibusa, it becomes essential for anyone initiating a change in Ibusa to bridge the communication by having a good understanding of what pertains in the village.

Figure 4: Deaths during such chaos
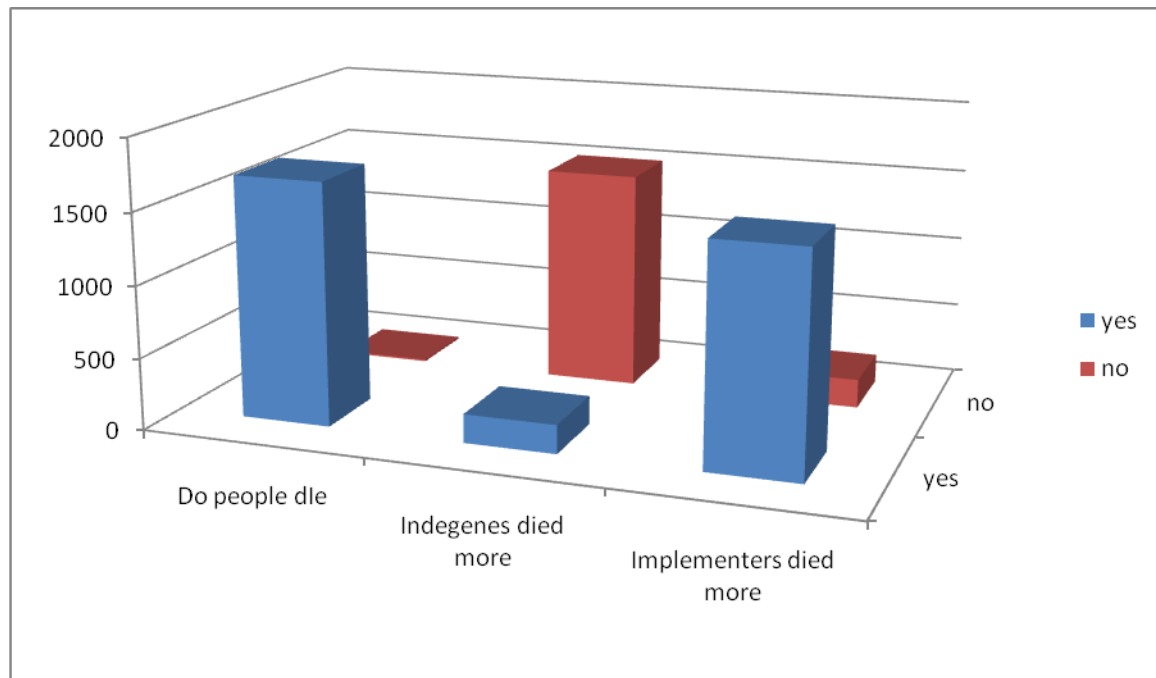
Conclusion

It is obvious from this research that tradomedia, which refers to the various traditional or local media of communication in rural areas, are still the chief means of effecting change harmoniously in rural communities in spite of the wide-spread presence of the exogenous media. Although rustic, largely rudimentary, and narrow in scope, tradomedia are more effective in dissemination of information in rural areas. Already a part of their day-to-day lives, tradomedia are sustained and strengthened by interpersonal communication and traditional norms. The ruralites understand, accept as true, and effortlessly comprehend all messages coming from their local media channels, as opposed to the modern means of communication. The communication values of tradomedia are beyond questioning. The most interesting part of tradomedia is that the users not only place high value on them, but also "all" the villagers comply with any information from that end. This is because ruralites hold their cultural heritage in high esteem and thus value any message from their local media. All attempts by the government to use the mass media leaves a large number of them ignorant and hostile to government plans, policies, and programs even at their own expense.

On this note, governments, institutions, and non-governmental organizations with any intention of reaching, changing, and developing the people in rural communities ought to involve a larger portion of the available tradomedia in each distinctive rural community as opposed to the mass media so as to avert any form of disharmony, riots, or deaths of innocuous implementers and indigenes.

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