

The Role of Communication in Nation Building in Nigeria: A Reading of Genesis 11:1-9

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Abstract

Information is powerful and important, but it remains futile in the absence of communication. Therefore, the relevance of communication as a vehicle of information cannot be overemphasized, and it encompasses all types of interpersonal contact in oral and written forms. The experience of the people in the story of men's attempt to build a tower in Babel that will reach heaven; the abode of God explains the challenges faced by human beings when God confused their languages. Today, Nigeria lacks nationhood and there are multiple languages and multiple ethnic groups. Ethnicity and tribalism has eaten dip into the fabrics of Nigeria and as such has stunted the developmental tendencies and nation building in Nigeria. This has not been positively managed, but rather it has remained a serious challenge to the nation. This paper examined the role of communication in nation-building through historical and hermeneutical methods of interpreting Genesis 11:1-9. Tracing the indispensability of communication in society ranging from the primeval period, the paper discovered communication as an effective instrument for maintaining peace, unity, and harmony in society. The political and economic development of a nation depends on the usage of communication either in print or verbal. The work identified some problems of communication in terms of ulterior motives, noise, nuisance and language barriers. The paper recommended moral, technological, lingual and human-divine communication improvement, for national development and nation-building.

Keywords: Communication, Nation Building, Reading

Introduction

Communication and information technology have gained global attention in that almost every aspect of living is connected to the subject matter. Man as a social being cannot survive without communication because even the world was created by divine communication. God spoke and it was so. The first account of creation reveals that the "word" (dabar in Hebrew) was God's instrument and raw material for creation which shows the creative power of oral communication (Gen 1:27-28). He communicated with the first human beings to build a cordial relationship that would be infinite (Gen 2:16). Unfortunately, the momentary communication gap between Adam and Eve was utilized by the Serpent to deceive Eve, hence the fall of man consequent upon disobedience to God's instruction (Gen 3:1, 8-9). The episode of the Tower of Babel also shows the power of communication in nation-building (Gen 11:1). Nigeria is a country that has different ethnic groups with their multiple languages. The challenge of tribalism which is greatly fueled by lack of sense of nationhood and multi-lingual franca has affected Nigeria negatively with respect to nation-building and all-round development. Nigeria has not positively managed the divers' ethnic groups that converged in the geographical region called Niger-area, rather this rich and diverse ethnic groups that would have been blessing to the country, has become a problem to Nigeria. God recognized communication as a tool for national success and He multiplied languages by tampering with the lingua franca of the first community after the deluge (Gen 11:7). Studies have viewed the reason for confusing the monolingual of the people building the Tower of Babel as unwise usage of language and rebellion against God. However, this paper aims to investigate the relevance of effective communication in nation-building, types, methods and challenges of effective communication in contemporary society with lessons from Genesis 11:1-9.

Conceptual Clarifications

The etymological concept of communication is derived from the Latin word *communicare* which means to make common. This informed the definition of communication by Alexander (1959) as a process of making common to two or several persons what was the monopoly of one or some persons. According to Wilbur and Roberts (1971), communication is the sharing of an orientation towards a set of informal signs; whereas Fiske (1990) views it as social interaction using messages which are both human and technological.

A nation is a country considered with its people, social and economic structure or large group of people of the same race and language according to Longman (1995). The word "building" in nation-building connotes development as noted by Hornby (2000). This development is viewed by Aghadiuno (1997) as a multidimensional process involving the achievement of satisfying the need for food, health, potable water supply, shelter, clothing, education, security, communication, energy, and leisure. Nweke (2009) states that nation-building involves the upward movement of the country's social, economic, and political system, which depends on the survival of every family as a unit of the large society. The stability and roles of other agents of socialization cannot be undermined in nation-building, in the sense that the effective communication of knowledge, values and skills enhances learning and interpersonal relationships in schools, markets and other social gatherings.

Effective communication in the sense of morality and national development builds a nation. For Ikemuelu (1993), nation-building is a phenomenon interwoven with modernization. Nation-building according to Ezeanya (1980) begins with the development of the people who make up the nation; whereas Ezegebe (1992) views it as the orientation of the citizens to uphold integrity, diligence and collaboration. Nation-building is a process of encouraging people with diverse beliefs, different socio-political opinions, varied cultural values, and orientation values to agree to live together as citizens of one nation that is economically viable, politically stable, and culturally homogenous.

Nature of Communication

Communication is a complex phenomenon that emanated from the primeval period comprising the basic components of exchanging information or sharing messages. Every communication has a message which comes from the sender to the recipient. The message originates from a source and passes through a medium to be received by an audience that gives feedback in response to the message. The complete conversation between the communicator and the audience is what Okunna (2002) refers to as a basic model of the communication system. Therefore, communication is a system that conveys information or messages from the sender to the receiver through a medium that requires feedback. Nweke (2009) agrees that communication is not effective and cannot be considered complete without feedback. This implies that communication that results in nation-building must have feedback which is the response from the receiver whether positive or negative. Bohn (1985) avers that feedback makes communication cooperative and collaborative as a two-way process with mutual experience and exchange of ideas. This feedback may be instantaneous or sporadic. The complexity of communication lies in the possible interference in the system or distortion of the message. Such unforeseen interference can pollute the message or hinder the feedback which therefore renders the communication ineffective and retard the growth of a nation.

It is important to note that the mode of feedback varies and depends on the type of communication applied. The effectiveness of communication should be measured in cognizance of the communication type determined also by the medium of conveyance. For instance communication can occur through verbal, written, and non-verbal forms in formal or informal contexts. The informal context of communication has no organized, structured, planned, or generally acceptable or regulated pattern for conveying a message to an audience. It is a non-ceremonial, unofficial and casual method of disseminating information orally or written. Instances of this include home discussions; and personal and confidential conversations in unofficial gatherings. On the other hand, communication is formal in terms of the official dissemination of messages through addresses, manifestos, letters, internal memos, minutes, and mass media. Oral communication makes use of voice that produces sound which embodies the message of the sender. It can be presented formally or informally, in face to-face conversations, or through mass media (Television, Radio, and Telephone).

It is instructive to note that the message could also be by signals, visual aids, or symbols just as the audience could be the viewers or listeners depending on the medium of communication adopted. Argyle (1976) emphasizes on bodily communication used in human society in different ways such as sporting language, replacing language, expressing emotions, expressing interpersonal attitudes, conveying information about the person, in ceremony and ritual, in propaganda, at political meetings and demonstrations in the arts. Bodily communication which is also referred to as non-verbal communication (NVC) comprises non-verbal signals and bodily movements that can be analyzed in purely physical terms with meaning to a sender who encodes and a receiver who decodes it. The complexity of encoding and decoding lies in the difficulty of understanding the intentions of the communicator and the interpretation of the receiver.

Exposition of Genesis 11: 1-9 in the Context of Communication and Nation-Building

The main theme that could easily be identified in Genesis 11:1-9 is the confusion of languages as a result of rebellion. Scholars spot the sin of human pride in a cursory look but this paper focuses more on the potential of communication in nation-building. The episode of Genesis 11:1-9 is attributed to J (Yahwist) source of the Pentateuch but specifically a tale of the children of men who were unified by one language and decided to build a tower with its top in the heavens to make a name for themselves (Genesis 11:4-5). The arrogant motive of those who survived the flood infuriated God

to scatter them abroad, over the face of the earth (Gen. 11:8). Apart from the preconceived hubris to be famous which was viewed as rebellion, another important subject that aroused curiosity to write this paper is the role of communication in the text under study.

Just like the name of the first book of the Bible (Genesis) in Hebrew connotes "in the beginning", the interest in origins which reveals the origin of diverse people and languages suggests that the author of this episode is J'. This particular J' narrative concluded the introductory part of the myth in the primeval period to establish the history of Israel as one of the diverse peoples from the lineage of Abraham in the patriarchal era. Buttrick (1952) notes that this J' material is now preserved in verses 4a, 5, 6, and 8a with the omission of "a city" and "and" in verse 5, pointing out that verse 4a is not the original beginning of the episode. On the other hand, J' dropped this tale, having prepared for the tale by the note regarding Peleg in Gen 10:25 that, "in his days the earth was divided," substituted for it verse 2, making the actors the early descendants of Noah and locating the tower in a plain in the land of Shinar which they had reached as they "migrated" from the east.

Hesselgrave (1978) notes that one of the disastrous calamities that resulted from man's early rebellion against God was the disruption of that state described in Genesis 11:1. The potency of communication cannot be denied here. Despite the unlimited potential for mutual understanding and peace, mankind also had the unimaginable potential of uniting evil forces. Man exploited the potential of uniting evil forces because he was in his fallen state, and as a result, God imposed a kind of cultural quarantine upon him (Gen 11:7). This explains the assertion of Kenneth Burke, thus: "Man's problem is Babel", considering human predicament. However, Maurice Mawby's comment for the community is thought-provoking thus: "You know, the greatest thing for the world would be a common language. I'd adopt any religion, it doesn't matter to me... man's not solitary; he can't live alone, so he has to learn how to live with his fellow humans" (p. 47).

The communication power of human to build a great nation in Genesis 11:1-9 is commendable but the gap between humans and divine communication makes it a rebellion. In other words, true communication that will lead to sustainable nation-building must be a divine-human relationship and this type of communication brings restoration. The story of the Tower of Babel consists of numerous theological lessons. The name Babel in Hebrew means the "gate of god" which was derived from the root verb *balal* which connotes "to confuse" or "to mix." Babel is the name of a major city founded by Nimrod in the land of Shinar in Ancient Babylonia (Gen 10:10). Though the Babylonian tradition holds that the city was founded by a powerful god called Marduk and was destroyed by Sargon in 2350 BC when he took earth from it to build his new capital called Agade. A text of *Sharkalisharri* belonging to the temple tower known as *Ziggurat* at Babylon confirms the existence of a sacred city on the site where burnt clay was used as bricks and bitumen for mortar (Gen 11:3).

The technological development of the city of Babel was possible because of communication. The political and economic stability probably gave rise to the accelerated implementation of the people's decision to build a tower that would reach heaven. Undoubtedly, the tower had a strong and deep foundation to support such a gigantic tower. The solid technological construction of the Tower gained a historical accolade and was mentioned in Babylonian tradition as the "House of the Foundation Platform of Heaven and Earth" known as *Etemenanki*. What a legendary! Marshal, Millard, Packer and Wiseman (2007) observe that some scholars associate Jacob's vision of a ladder and a gate of heaven (Gen 28:11-18) with a *ziggurat* of the kind once built at Babel.

The power of communication was so strong at Babel that nothing on earth could stop the nation-building except Yahweh's interruption of their communication through the confusion of their language that subsequently led to the dispersion of mankind on earth (Gen 11:9). Thus, Babel became a symbol of the pride and fall of man. Theologically, the confusion and broken fellowship between men and nations could be traced to Babel's story. The pride of humankind which evoked the language confusion as a divine wrath was premised on the abridged communication with God. The building of the nation was progressive due to good communication among the citizens but its sustainability was hampered by ineffective human-divine communication.

Adeyemo (2006) views Genesis 11:1 as an ideal situation for nation-building if communication is properly managed. Language as a divine gift must be valued and dictions engaged properly to foster human solidarity and morality for peaceful coexistence. Words play a major role in the Divine-human relationship to constitute a powerful instrument for national development. Thus, communication can build or destroy a nation, depending on its usage (Eccl. 5: 1-2). One of the flaws of the people of Babel that revealed their proud motives against God was the repetition of "ourselves" in their statement (Gen. 11:4), and the emphasis on making a "name" for themselves and not for the glory of God. Selfish interest in contrast to God's plan is unrighteous and sin is a reproach to any people but righteousness exalts a nation. The selfish desires of Babel's citizens to avoid dispersion was an opposition to God's plan to populate the earth,

(Gen. 1:27-28, 9:1), hence, the distortion of their communication power. God expected a cordial relationship with them through communication that would have resulted in torrential societal development; rather they displayed independence for their selfish reputation.

It is instructive to note that effective communication is highly needed on the ideals of community or society for national development communicated by God and not for popularity and fame. Any human infringement on the prerogative of God will certainly invoke the wrath (visitation) of God (Gen. 11:5).

Again, the statement "comes, let us go down and confuse their language, so they will not understand each other" (Gen.11: 6-7), shows the value of communication in nation-building. God knew that only the distortion of human communication could stop the work and scatter the works. When their communication link was tampered with, the builders could not understand themselves anymore. The vision was truated and manpower depreciated leading to the cessation of the entire work. This implies that communication problems lead to incomplete projects and unaccomplished visions or goals. Therefore, the indispensability of communication in family, church, politics, education, economy, national health and levels of leadership or organization cannot be undermined nor emphasized. Verse 9 presents the meaning of Babel and the reason for the name of the city "Babel" as a summary of the episode. Thus, "That is why it was called Babel because there the Lord confused the language of the... and from there the Lord scattered them.... This implies that confusion in communication breeds disunity in a nation. In other words, effective communication brings unity and development. This brings us to the implication of the narrative for contemporary nation-building through communication.

Roles of Communication in Nation-Building with Lessons from Genesis 11:1-9

The roles of communication in national development are enormous and cannot be overemphasized. Communication cuts across all facets of human endeavours. Politically it positions and creates a formidable image of the government agendas for general acceptability through setting agenda and disseminating the objectives to the public. It helps in sharing the implementation of government policies and programmes. Through communication realistic profiles can be synthesized for public offices and office holders.

Again, communication aids the projection of positive qualities, image and behaviours necessary for respectful offices and office holders like the National President, Vice President, Senate, and other honourable offices. The film industries through communication project positively the heroic and patriotic dispositions of the three tiers of government in Nigeria. This poses the challenge of high expectations on the leaders and gives the citizens a sense of security and hope for the development of the country.

Communication provides a bond that cements national unity amidst people of diverse religious and ethnic cultures. Common goals are set and ideas fostered for the accomplishment of desired objectives. The national vision shared via communication is strategically facilitated for posterity, while dialogue is enabled in times of crisis, intolerance and prejudice that might have been caused by allocation of power or resources. Communication fosters dialogue as an agent of reconciliation and integration for communal understanding. Communication controls security agencies to defend the nation in unison against internal rancor and external aggressions. It creates quick and effective awareness in the populace concerning insurgency for security measures to be taken with immediate effect. It also helps in forecasting the future and disseminating necessary information to the populace on the level of national progress.

Material and non-material resources are properly harnessed and distributed for national development through the aid of communication. When power is shared and resources are equitably allocated, then the national progress is multiplied for sustainable development. Communication enlightens and encourages every citizen to be patriotic and participatory in accomplishing a national goal in economy, politics, defense and education.

Communication has much to offer for societal development but its impact is determined by its effective use by people of any era. For instance, the laudable result of the city of Babel suggests the effective employment of communication in dialogue, patriotism, campaign, technological development and management of both material and non-material resources. Be it as it may, nation-building and national developments were crushed probably because of a lack of relationship with God which could be termed in this paper as a lack of "wireless communication" through prayer.

Ogungbo (2016) describes prayer as a precursor to wireless communication for human-divine relationships that yields unprecedented results. Since God is the creator of all things, wireless communication to Him produces insights and knowledge for national development. He has revealed himself through written communication means (Scriptures) for man to acquire knowledge. Much research needs to be done on the Bible for national development. This is because the Bible is an embodiment of a wealth of knowledge for diverse disciplines that would help build a nation, if conscientiously tapped and harnessed. Asaju (1999) affirms that science emanated from the Bible as the source of all knowledge. The knowledge of communication technologies, no doubt, came from the Scriptures. An instance is the

episode of "Tower of Babel" in which the people's technology and communication aided the building of the Tower to a greater extent. This paper underscores that the ineffectiveness of that communication hinges on their inability to communicate with God for direction. Thus, God introduced noise and distorted their communication with different languages that scattered them abroad. The city would not have collapsed if the people had maintained a good relationship with God.

Ogungbo (2016) compared prayer to wireless means of communication as used in the contemporary era. Thus, the global nature of phone calls is similar to prayer in the sense of world-wide accessibility. Through prayer human beings communicate with God for revelation and wisdom in building or developing a nation. Faith also provides a network to facilitate the wireless communication of prayer through which language and information are encoded. This is to say that God understands and gives consent to humans for societal or national development when communicated through prayer with a faith network. Wireless communication works faster and more effectively in nation-building than any other medium or type. This explains the indispensability of cordless communication via telephones, mass media (radio and television, and social media platforms, to mention but a few. E-mail too is a kind of wireless communication to convey and receive written messages. Therefore, prayer is a spiritual means of communication with divine and human entities and its effectiveness can be measured by its efficacy. This efficacious answer is the feedback that indicates the completion of the communication channel. Prayer provides the spring board for modern communication technology, just as the Bible predicts the future increase of knowledge. Thus, the role of spiritual or theological communication in nation-building cannot be overemphasized.

In theological terms, communication with the Supreme Being that lacks praise, sacrifice, purification, meditation and so on may not be effective for national development. In the same vein, communication that would yield effective results in contemporary society must be objective, purposeful, and creative toward national development, otherwise destruction or deterioration may occur. According to Fraser and Restrepo-Estrada (2001): "Communication succeeds when it is an integral part, from the very beginning, of a development programme, playing a full role during the identification of the problems and priorities, as well as during the detailed planning, implementation, and evaluation... communication needs clear objectives, identification of different audience groups... careful message design... and monitoring and feedback.

Picard and Pickard (2017) listed the following rubric of potential principles that are crucial in crafting a much reflective communication policy: Meeting fundamental communication and content needs; Providing effective ability for public use of media and communications; Promoting diversity/plurality in ownership of media and content available; Affording protection for users and society; Providing transparency and accountability; Pursuing developmental and economic benefits, Pursuing equitable and effective policy outcomes; To transfer technological innovations from development agencies to their clients and to create an appetite for change through raising a climate for modernization' among the members of the public.

Problems and Prospects of Communication in Nation-Building

The major problem of communication is called noise. It is a barrier caused by the distortion of the message being conveyed. Noise leads to the misunderstanding of the information and ineffective communication which may be identified physically, systematically, behaviourally, and seen as language ambiguity among others. Communication can also be affected negatively by environmental factors or the locations involved; even in terms of wireless communication provided by modern information technologies, the network system can pose a barrier to effective communication. Problems can arise from the dispositions of the sender and receiver. Physiological challenges of the communicators such as sight or hearing impairment can impede messages in a non-verbal means of communication. However, there has been improvement in communication by the use of modern communication technologies. Time and space problems have been covered by Information Communication Technology (ICT). The internet and the use of sophisticated computers have made the world a global village. The proper use of CCTV, Skype, video calls, and other sophisticated technological means promotes easy global security, commerce, and governance. As good as this ICT appears some unscrupulous politicians and citizens abuse the platforms for hate speech, scandals, attacks, and vilification of opponents in other political parties. This anomaly does not promote peace, unity, and national development. Therefore, any ulterior motive in the garb of ICT usage should be condemned as a problem to nation-building. Communication directed towards kidnapping, assassinations, insurgency, and political and economic corruption is a societal nuisance. The prospects of communication in nation-building hinge on, the moral dispositions of the citizenry, and diligence in both material and non-material management. Effective communication creates job opportunities and alleviates poverty.

On the other hand, it is instructive to note that any high communication technology that negates the spiritual communication or human-divine relationship would encumber national development to a great extent as in the case of

"Tower of Babel". Communication, therefore, should be holistic to ensure sustainable national development that encompasses human and natural resource management.

Recommendations

The "Tower of Babel" episode, the following are recommended:

1. Effective communication should not be underrated in nation-building.
2. Holistic communication which encompasses spiritual and physical means should be pursued for national unity and development.
3. Human-divine communication is fundamental in achieving all-round success in a nation and therefore should be maintained. This implies that high technological advancement without God's approval and constant relationship is tantamount to frustration, deterioration and instability as seen in the Genesis 11 episode.
4. The leaders and citizens of any nation should uphold the positive and objective use of modern Information Communication Technology (ICT) to ensure sustainable national development.
5. Some problems of communication which include noise, rebellion, nuisance, ulterior motives, and language barriers should be avoided in nation-building. Things that strengthen nationhood and patriotism should be encouraged. Citizen education should be encouraged.

Conclusion

Communication is vital in nation-building. It cements the unity of ethnic groups in a nation and helps in political campaigns, governance and national security. The idea of multi-ethnic groups in Nigeria if positively managed should be strength to the country and not weakness. Though there are many languages, the idea of nationhood should be advocated by the leaders both at the political, religious and economic fronts of the country. Material and non-material resources are harnessed for national development while information is easily accessed through oral and written media of communication. Feedback is important in both spiritual and physical communication as a sign of completion for sustainable development. Just as wireless communication and the internet are indispensable in the modern era, prayer and faith are fundamental in human-divine relationships. Communication helped in the building of the "Tower of Babel" but its collapse was a result of poor or lack of communication with God for divine approval. The lesson of the confused tongue shows the impact of communication in nation-building. Therefore, effective communication is indispensable in nation-building.

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