

**Managing Social Change In Nigeria**

**Written By Uche Nworah**

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## **Introduction**

Africa is once again on the agenda of the global community, there appear to be shared concerns and views amongst the developed countries and the developing (African) countries, that critical initiatives are needed to tackle some of the problems which have continued to plague the continent and retard her progress, these issues have been identified by several commentators to include unemployment, poor infrastructural development, corruption, indiscipline, poverty, and mass migration. The later has led to what is now known as the brain drain syndrome.

All over Africa, several reforms and social change programmes are currently being sponsored and implemented by donor and aid agencies, Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and also by Africans themselves in collaboration with their respective governments, with the intentions of moving the continent forward.

The Nigerian government for instance is currently in the process of carrying out the biggest social change and reform programme ever witnessed in the country; involving almost every aspect of the political, social and economic lives of Nigerians. The President Olusegun Obasanjo government – led reform programmes have however attracted several criticisms from the citizens and other cynics especially over the government's genuine intentions, and the manner with which it is implementing the reforms.

The change management process of some of these reform programmes will be critically analysed in this paper, this analysis will be underpinned in some known theories of change management, which have been adopted as models and examples of best practice.

## **Methodology**

The case study approach has been chosen for this paper; this researcher considers this method of qualitative research to be suitable because it enables the researcher to explore issues from multiple sources of information including personal experience, case studies, observations, interviews, documents and records.

However, there are issues associated with this type of research methods, selection of many case studies for study may affect the depth of analysis for each individual case selected, and this may affect the value of the analysis. Also relying on secondary sources may sometimes affect research validity because some of the information may no longer be current.

However, because this is a small scale research; this researcher considers the method adopted to be the most convenient and effective to be used in this case because it covers the research scope.

## **Definition of Terms**

*Social change:* Any change in social relations that cause a change in a society or transformation of its social structure.

*Innovation:* Introduction of a new idea into the marketplace or society, in the form of a new product or service or an improvement in organization or process.

*Top-down Management:* A linear process of decision making and implementation which does not involve the opinions of people down the linear chain.

*Bottom-up Management:* A transactional process of decision making and implementation which takes into considerations the opinions of people along the chain.

## **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

In a recent article in the *Nigerian Guardian* newspaper, Luke Onyekakeyah writes that reforms have been the main thrust of the Olusegun Obasanjo government since inception in 1999, he justifies his arguments by describing the various reforms currently going on in both the gas and energy sectors, and also in the maritime, financial and health sectors, he acknowledges the importance of such changes in the system but challenges the government on its approach. He faults the Nigerian government's method of wholesale economic and social reforms, and advocated a more systematic and gradual approach on sector-by-sector basis.

Luke's suggestion, though made with the best intentions however may not be ideal for a complex society like Nigeria, where the social systems and values are inter-twined with each other, it may be difficult, time-consuming and costly to focus on individual sectors separately especially when there seem to be a general consensus amongst the citizenry that all the sectors suffer similar malaise and therefore require urgent and extreme measures.

Jerry Ogbonna in an article in *This Day* newspaper also takes up issues with the Nigerian government over the method of implementation of its reform programmes, he acknowledges that the government's economic reform programmes are steps in the right direction, but however maintains that the reforms will not yield the desired results if an accompanying social change programme is not simultaneously and successfully implemented, by this he means changing the attitudes of Nigerian to work, governance and corruption. I agree with the writer on this because just as several other writers have argued, the problem with Nigeria is not only bad leadership but also bad followership, the citizens need to be empowered and made aware of their role in governance, a viable social system of shared values, roles and responsibilities may encourage and enhance this process.

A critical analysis of some of the known theories of change management is necessary at this point, but in analysing such theories, it is important to also evaluate their relevance, suitability and workability in the Nigerian context and also within a much broader developing country framework, this means that social and cultural dimensions should be taken into considerations because while such theories may work in the developed countries, they may not necessarily be successful in Nigeria due to many factors, such as the complex and bureaucratic nature of government institutions and organisations, the mistrust of government officials and their intentions by the citizens,

the lack of political will and leadership vision and skills required to successfully implement any such reforms.

Storey and Salaman (2005) write of the need for developed countries such as Austria, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden and UK to devise innovation policies which will in turn produce ‘innovation-driven’ economies, they argue that such a policy which is a driver of economic competitiveness and human well-being and development is necessary in the light of rapid global technological changes, trade liberalisation, intense competition from low-wage economies, the reduction in communication and transport costs, shorter product life cycles and the rates with which consumers switch brand preferences. *‘Innovation is regarded by policy makers as one of the most critical –if not, indeed, the most critical – element influencing organisational and national economic performance’*, they said. These views are also supported by other writers and observers, Burnes (2000) argued that neither strategy nor change management would be considered important if products and markets were stable. Unfortunately this is not the case as shown by the global economic downturn which has hit the developed countries and even the developing countries harder, there is the need for businesses, organisations and governments of developing countries like Nigeria to make change an ever-present feature of their planning process, as they still grapple with a myriad of socio-economic problems.

Probably as a result of the recognition of the need for socio-economic reforms and change, the President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo at a recent speech made at the United Nations said that the ambitious economic reforms of his government will constitute an important national contribution to the attainment of the targets of the Millennium Development Goals, and of the objectives of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), according to the President, *‘the new reform programme of my government is a clarion call for national mobilization and national reorientation’*. This statement obviously supports Jerry Ogbonna’s views on the need for citizenship involvement with the government’s economic and social reforms programme.

Major theories on change draw from other social science disciplines and traditions (Burnes *ibid*), the organised private sector is usually the focus of such studies, with companies like Microsoft, Amazon, EasyJet, Dell and Egg used as models of best practice, because of the innovative ways they have wrestled market leadership from the previous market leaders. However, with the increasing demand for performance and accountability in the public sector, the concepts of reforms, change and innovation are also now being applied in the sector; however this needs to be adopted with caution because of the peculiar dynamics at play in the sector. While it may be possible for an entrepreneur to easily re-structure his or her enterprise, armed with the weapon of *wielding the big stick* on the employees who are considered to be under performing (*innovate or die*), it may not be so simple to apply the same procedures in the public sector, this is mainly because of what is largely known in Nigeria as the *civil service mentality* (a phrase used to describe the sluggish and bureaucratic service delivery process in government ministries and parastatals).

In a paper on the private sector response to reforms in Nigeria, the Abuja based *Independent Policy Group (IPG)* noted that *‘reforms have had to deal with stifling*

*and sometimes hostile bureaucratic environment'*, obviously referring to the frustration of the private sector who are in some ways dependent on the public sector for the successful running of their operations.

Private sector workers may therefore respond to change faster than public sector workers because they may be more motivated, better trained and equipped to embrace change compared to their public sector counterparts who are sometimes owed salary arrears and who also have limited opportunities for training and career progression. Burnes (ibid) considers the three types of changes which have significantly impacted on organisations in the last two decades as *Total Quality Management (TQM)*, an organisation – wide effort to improve quality through changes in structure, practices, systems and attitudes (Dale and Cooper, 1992), *Introduction of new technology* and *Business Process-Re-engineering (BPR)*, defined by Wastell *et al* (1994) to include initiatives, large and small, radical and conservative, whose common theme is the achievement of significant organisational performance by augmenting the efficiency and effectiveness of key business processes.

In Nigeria, these three concepts have been introduced in most private enterprises, especially in the big banks and manufacturing companies, where their managers and directors are graduates of top universities in Europe and America and the staff have benefited from short management courses abroad, organisations like GTBank, UBA, Unilever, Platinum Bank and STB have indeed set the standard in this regard. The market leadership positions of these firms may suggest that there is a strong correlation between training and exposure to change in other cultures by Nigerian managers, change implementation and organisational success.

Some proponents of the *incremental model of change* such as Lindblom (1959), Quinn (1982) Pettigrew (1992) posit that change comes through successive, limited and negotiated shifts, a process of focussing on individual parts of an organisation, and dealing with one problem and one goal at a time. Their views are quite similar to the Japanese *Kaizen* concept of continuous, progressive and incremental improvement developed by Taiichi Ohno and Shigeo Shingo. These views are also in line with those of Luke Onyekakeyah, while I agree that incremental changes are desirable rather than wholesale, big, bold, sudden and ground breaking changes, such changes however should be introduced simultaneously across the different sectors, rather than focussing on individual sectors and then moving to the other sectors when the set tasks have been accomplished. These appear to be the standpoint of proponents of the continuous transformation model of change as shown by the works of Peters (1997) and Kanter *et al* (1997), they argue that the environment in which organisations operate is constantly, rapidly and radically changing, and that organisations can only remain aligned with their environment and thus survive by continuously transforming their operations.

Based on the changing patterns of both the local Nigerian and global environments, a transactional and transformational model of change becomes imperative, as this will involve all sectors and systems. The only challenge will be in the ability of the change agents (the Nigerian government) to provide the tools and resources needed to implement the changes, and also in overcoming cynics and detractors, this is because *'In Nigeria, the potential critics of modernism are likely to be the oligarchs,*

*politicians and the opinion leaders, beneficiaries of a backward and highly corrupt economy'* (Nworah 2004).

Another new paradigm in change management which may be quite appropriate for a complex and chaotic environment like Nigeria is the Chaos theory. Although originally developed in the physical sciences, the concept is now increasingly adopted by organisations theorists (Burnes, *ibid*). According to Prigogine and Stengers, (1984), *'disequilibrium is a necessary condition for the growth of dynamic systems'*. Bernstein (1996) argues that in such a state of disequilibrium, everything is in a state of flux and the idea of a norm does not exist. It is so easy to picture the traffic scene at the famous Ojuelegba roundabout in the Surulere part of Lagos in Nigeria, and how hundreds of motorists coming from several directions try to squeeze through the traffic without obeying the traffic warden's directions; this scenario also best describes the traffic situation on Nigeria's major roads.

There is not a culture of queuing for services in Nigeria, be it at the banks, petrol stations, shops etc. In government offices, workers are now so used to carrying out their duties in slow and sluggish paces, the level of customer service is also poor, the situation can only best be described as chaotic hence my belief that the chaos theory may be ideal in our circumstances. Overman (1996) writes that the chaos theory is a study of complex, dynamic systems that reveal patterns of order out of seemingly chaotic behaviours. The complexity of the Nigerian environment requires further analysis here in order to place the chaos theory into context; Nigeria has a population of over 120 million people, a complex multi-ethnic composition. The cultural, language and religious differences make any wholesale agreement impossible as the citizens still have primordial attachments to their immediate and core ethnic regions. Long years of political and religious bickering between the three major ethnic groups (Yoruba, Hausa and the Igbos) have made working together and reaching a national consensus in major issues almost impossible. As if in support of the Chaos theory approach, Ozodi Thomas Osuji (2005) writes that embracing problems and seeing them as opportunities is a positive way of living, according to him *'It is impossible to have such a problem free existence. It is a waste of time and energy to desire such a life; it is escapist from life...we shall always have problems and must seek ways to solve them'*.

Nigeria's other problems have also been identified as bribery and corruption, unemployment, poor infrastructural development, over dependence in the oil sector for federal income and revenue, poor work ethics, increasing citizens dissatisfaction and disaffection with the government, political structures and politicians, corporate and large scale organizational irresponsibility, inadequate funding of the educational, health and other key sectors, neglect of the agricultural and other non-oil productive/manufacturing sectors, continued manufacture of poor quality, fake and substandard goods and services, over dependence on imported goods, poorly regulated capital and financial market, tribal, ethnic and religious squabbles, homelessness, poverty and hunger, poor maintenance culture, poor planning, lack of security and disregard for human life and property, armed and pen robbery, and others (Nworah 2004).

Interestingly, Kiel 1993 states that *'the existence of apparent...disorder, or chaos, in a system does not necessarily mean that the system is malfunctioning or headed*

*towards disintegration. Instead, chaos may represent exploration of a variety of possibilities... to adapt to changing circumstances'*. The challenge for the change agents in Nigeria will then be to recognise these complexities in the system, and try to understand the main motives behind the undesirable chaotic behaviours, it could be also that the change agents are part of the problems and their intentions are being perceived wrongly by the citizens based on past experiences and also based on the wrong signals they send across. Such introspective analysis by the change agents is necessary for a clearer understanding of and adaptation to changing circumstances.

### **Social Change in Nigeria**

Previous governments in Nigeria have tried to introduce and implement different social, economic and political reforms in Nigeria; such reform programmes could neither be described as successes nor failures because they were abandoned half-way, calling into question the real intentions of the government of the day that might have introduced them. It is such un-coordinated, mediocre and inconclusive approaches to change management that has made Nigerians to be resistant to change and reform programmes, Nigerians also allege that such reform programmes from the government are only used as conduit pipes to siphon public funds. We can easily recall in the not so distant past in our national history reform programmes such as the War Against indiscipline (WAI) started by the Muhammad Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon government in 1984. The programme despite the hype and euphoria that surrounded its introduction was subsequently cancelled when Ibrahim Babangida took over as military head of state in 1985; his government replaced the WAI campaign with what it called the Mass Mobilization for Self-Reliance and Social Justice (MAMSER) campaign, as part of what it called the social re-engineering process. Babangida's social re-engineering programme also included political and economic reforms. At this period, new phrases were introduced into Nigeria's national life, for example the International Monetary Fund (IMF) - inspired Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), the infamous Option A4 political programme. His government also congregated the Constituent Assembly, set up the Peoples Bank, a government bank charged with the responsibility of providing micro-credit to the poor who were not able to provide the collateral security requested by the traditional lenders and banks.

However, all these reform programmes, noble and novel concepts were marred by poor implementations, hence critics are quick to write off their impacts and success the same way the Babangida government has been easily written off, Banji Odotola says that *'Ibrahim Babangida used analogy and his attempt was flat because the economic woes of this nation is in the foundation of his 're-engineering' of our social and moral ethos. The result of which has badly redefined us as a nation and a people'*. Also Babangida's wife, Miriam Babangida managed a government funded project termed Better Life for Rural Women, the project like all the other reform projects of the Babangida government fell flat on its face, because Nigerians couldn't see the real benefits, rather all they could see was the swelling foreign bank accounts of the Babangidas.

When Sani Abacha took over government in a palace coup in 1993, his government continued along the same path, they re-christened some of the already running reform programmes, MAMSER became NOA (National Orientation Agency), and Miriam

Babangida's pet project (Better Life for Rural Women) was transformed into the Family Support Programme (FSP) which eventually led to the creation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare.

The President Olusegun Obasanjo government has carried on where the previous governments stopped, Stella Obasanjo (the President's wife) before her death in a Spanish hospital in October 2005 set up the Child Care Trust, another first lady pet project to replace Myriam Abacha's Family Support Programme. The Obasanjo government has however been praised by many observers for its various reform programmes. The Independent Policy Group (IPG), an Abuja – based think-tank group says that the reform programmes will create a new social and economic order, that would promote sustainable development and reduce the level of poverty. *'The aim has been to enthrone good governance, accountability and transparency and the reduction'*.

Other major reform programmes of the present government is the N25 Billion Banks Capitalisation policy of the Central Bank of Nigeria, the Political Reforms Process which culminated in the stalemated National Political Reform Conference (NPRC), Educational reforms which has led to the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE), licensing of private universities and the reduction in grants and subventions to government universities. Others include the setting up of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), charged with the responsibility of tackling and ridding Nigeria of corruption, the setting up of the Budget Monitoring and Implementation Office (also known as Due Diligence) in the Presidency, the introduction of the Nigeria Image Project (now renamed The Heart of Africa Project), the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), Deregulation and Privatisation of key public enterprises etc.

### **Implementing Social Change in Nigeria**

An early model of change developed by Kurt Lewin (1951) described change as a three-stage process. The first stage (Unfreezing) involves overcoming inertia and apathy and tackling the existing 'mind set', the second stage (moving to the new level) is when change actually occurs. At the third stage (Refreezing), the new mind set is stabilised to prevent regression to the old ways. Lewin's model appears too linear and simplistic to be applied in a complex environment like Nigeria. A more workable transactional approach would have been more appropriate, this will involve the introduction of a feedback loop in the process, such a process will also be dependent on the active involvement and cooperation of those at the bottom of the chain who will feel the impact of the change more. The preference for a *bottom-up* approach as compared to the traditional *top-down* approach, which the change agents in Nigeria seem to prefer is desirable as it will give those at the bottom a sense of belonging, shared understanding and values.

The success of the present government's reforms programme is hinged mainly on the success of its fight against corruption. Several observers have commented on the corruption scourge in Nigeria. Jerry Ogbonna (ibid) writes that *'the major obstacle to the success of the reform programme is corruption which permeates the entire fabric of our national life...corruption is a disease which has affected the nation through negligence of previous leadership of the country'*. According to Peter Eigen, The

Chairman of Transparency International, “*Corruption robs countries of their potentials... Corruption in large-scale public projects is a daunting obstacle to sustainable development, and results in a major loss of public funds needed for education, health care and poverty alleviation, both in developed and developing countries*”.

Nigerians do not feel involved with government’s anti-corruption drive, this is mainly because of what Effective Business Survey Nigeria Limited (EBS), an independent research organisation described as the selective way in which the government through the EFCC investigates, arrests and prosecutes corrupt public officers, in a recent poll by the organisation, 51 percent of the respondents scored the EFCC low, while 39 percent believed otherwise, with 10 percent undecided. The US government through one of its envoys in Nigeria, expressed similar feelings from the American government, at a recent weekly media briefing Michael L. McGee said that merely arresting people connected with financial crimes is not enough proof of the country’s seriousness to combat corruption, according to him, ‘*When you have hundreds of cases that were brought and you have thousands of people that were investigated and you have one conviction (Amaka Anajemba) from the EFCC, what does that tell you?*’.

Professor Idowu Sobowale of the Lagos State University (LASU), in a paper titled *Opinion Polling in Nigeria: A Neglected Route to National Development* urged all levels of government in Nigeria to adopt opinion polling as a strategy to make their policies suit the needs of the people, his views were supported by professor Abisogun Leigh and Alhaji Lateef Jakande who both concluded that opinion polling will enable the government to feel the mood and get more feedback from the people. Ozodi Thomas Osuji also submit that although statesmen (politicians and government officials), must sometimes overrule the opinion of their constituents and implement public policies that, in their judgments, are more prudent for the polity, their policies should be primarily based on public opinion, but sadly ‘*the practice is absent from Nigeria. The Nigerian government does not have the resources to find out what the people are thinking on specific issues*’.

It is important to add here that it is not so much a question of lack of resources on the part of the Nigerian government, but also a lack of interest in finding out the issues bothering the people the most, but just like Osuji said, such extensive surveys may just be a waste of time and resources being that what needs to be done in Nigeria are quite obvious. This issue of stakeholder consultation was also recently echoed by Dr. Olusegun Agagu, the Governor of Ondo State who advised the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) to always consult the oil-producing states before embarking on projects in the Niger Delta.

There are several other examples in Nigeria of failed and unpopular policies, mainly due to lack of consultation with the stakeholders. Bowing to foreign pressure, the Obasanjo government recently increased the pump price of fuel by about 50%, bringing the price of petrol to around N74 (55 US cents) compared with N22 when it first came into office in 1999. Each increase is normally met with crippling nationwide strikes and riots, the economic loses would have been avoided if the government had carried all the stakeholders along before introducing the increase. Responding to the latest increase, Adams Oshiomhole (the President of the Nigeria

Labour Congress) said that the current increase is unsustainable, as it has worsened the poverty situation in the country.

The Nigerian government through the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) has announced plans to scrap primary and secondary education with effect from next academic year (2006/2007), according to the council a basic education programme will replace the current 6-3-3-4 system which was also recently introduced. It is such constant policy shifts without stakeholder consultations that has made the Nigerian Guardian newspaper editorial to conclude that *'the cavalier manner in which the announcement of such a fundamental change was made to the nation invites worry and concern'*, the editorial also went on to ask why the matter was not subjected to a national debate at its proposal stage, and also wondered how broad, if any consultations with stakeholders have been. The paper finally called the proposed 6-9-3 educational system a distraction and called for it to be discarded. Another case in point is the controversy trailing the recently introduced Post - University Matriculation Examination (Post - UME), this new policy directive from the Federal Ministry of Education allows universities to conduct entrance examinations for candidates who have already passed the centrally administered Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) examinations. This new policy was introduced to combat the inefficiencies in the JAMB system but its introduction hasn't gone down well with all the key stakeholders who do not seem to have been consulted by the ministry. Pius Isume calls it *'another grand (?) policy decision made using the abnormal top-down approach'*; he believes that the post - UME examinations is the final death to university education in Nigeria. The National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) in a recent statement opposed the new exams and has threatened to go on strike. Educational Development Support Services (a non- governmental organisation) has gone a step further in its protests and has dragged the federal government, the National Universities Commission (NUC), and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) to court challenging the legality of the ministry's policy saying that it contradicts Section 6 of the JAMB Decree of 1989.

In an interview, I asked a senior civil servant and a policy maker in one of Nigeria's High Commissions in Europe to describe some of the policies that has been recently introduced by the High Commission, the subject mentioned the suspension of the issuance of travel certificates (TC) to Nigerians, the introduction of electronic payment system and the introduction of higher fees for the renewal and issuance of new passports. I also asked the subject to what extent the High Commission's key stakeholders were consulted or involved in the formulation of the new policies, the subject replied that no such consultations took place, but however agreed that it was important to involve them, the problem according to the subject was the civil service structure and the way it works, saying that there was little room for stakeholder consultation.

The subject also reported that such high level policies were usually formulated at the Federal Ministry of External Affairs in Abuja, and then passed on to the various foreign missions for implementation. Obviously the people in Abuja are not aware of the peculiar needs of the High Commissions' stakeholders in the immediate environment. I asked the subject if they also make any inputs to the External Affairs ministry in Abuja before policies are formulated, the subject replied that they do advise and make suggestions but that the ministry is not bound to take them. The

subject used the introduction of the electronic payment system for consular services as an example, this initiative came from the High Commission which having done a survey of its environment recognised that the society in which they were operating in was a plastic and cash-less society, and so it introduced the system to enable its customers and clients to pay with their debit and credit cards. This system however has met with stiff resistance from Abuja, which has directed that the High Commission revert back to its cash-only payment system. The ministry's reason was that the account reconciliation time with the new system was longer and starved the High Commission of operating cash. This is another example of top-down change management approach, and resistance to change, from those who are supposed to be implementing change, for this reason Nigerians do not often think that the government is serious about reforms.

Certain observers believe that the major challenge facing social change in Nigeria is poor leadership, In reference to the poor management and leadership skills of Nigerian leaders, Chris Ngwodo in an article succinctly titled *System Failure, Religion, Corruption And Violence* said that the Nigerian system has been set free from the linear moral assumptions, and so mediocrity has been enthroned while excellence and integrity are lightly esteemed. Chinua Achebe, the author of the classic novel *Things Fall Apart* in the book *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1983) wrote that "*the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership.*" He pointed out that "*there is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character, there is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else,*" but leadership. According to Victor Dike (1999) '*the lack of selfless, non-corrupt and committed leaders has contributed immensely to the socio-political and economic predicaments facing Nigeria today*'.

Sparks (1993) offers some useful tips to managers and leaders to help them in the management of change. Sparks' concept though written with educational institutions in mind can still be applied with some modifications in a universal context. *Educate the leaders of change*; this involves training and staff development and would also have financial and resource implications especially for a country like Nigeria. In this regard, the leaders and change agents in question will include '*persons who occupy important positions in the formal polity such as Presidents, Prime Ministers, Ministers, Governors, Legislators, Party Officials, Local Government Chairmen, Council Members and of course, the local Chiefs*' (Dike 1999). Those along the service delivery chain also require additional skills development.

*Use a systems approach which involves all sectors.* The systems approach is ideal for Nigeria because of the level of decay and malaise evident in all the sectors, however, the planned change should be phased, gradual and incremental.

*Use a team approach that involves many stakeholders in the change process.* This counters the traditional top-down approach preferred by change agents in Nigeria, the process should involve consultations with opinion leaders and opinion polling with the rest of the population.

*Power sharing*, this requires empowering other change agents down the chain to make decisions especially civil servants, the High Commission's electronic payment system

initiative is an example of how civil servants are not empowered, centralization of power and decision making does slow down the change process.

*Make plans.* This requires the setting out of both short-term and long-term plans which should also be made a bit flexible to reflect contingencies and changing circumstances, it is often the case that government officials fail to plan in Nigeria and even when they do, their plans are sometimes so rigid that they do not often reflect changing times, hence Nigerians often accuse civil servants of 'living in the past' because of the slow pace of service delivery and also the poor or non-existent customer/client service.

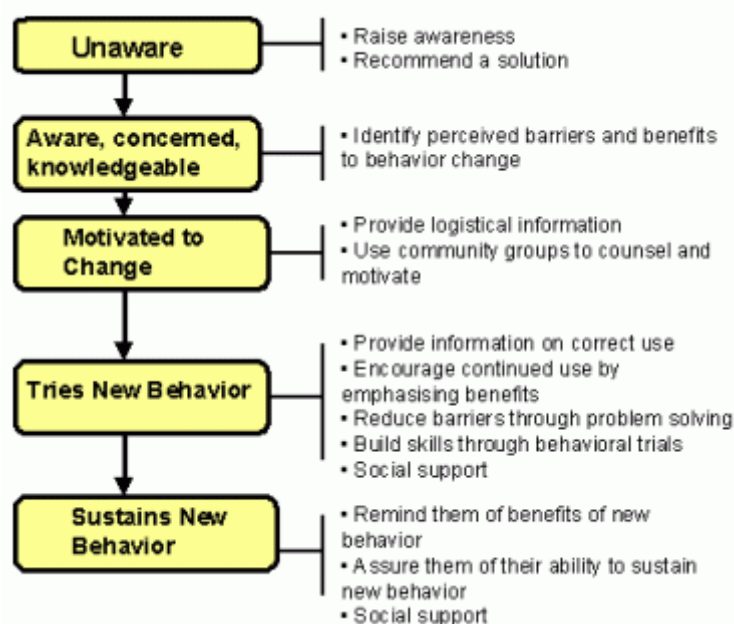
*Be aware of the conflict/tension factor between the change agents and the stakeholders.* This is normal in a country like Nigeria where the citizens distrust the government as a result of past experiences; therefore the change agents must live above board in order to restore their credibility and gain the trust and cooperation of the citizens.

*Choose innovative practices.* Practices that have been tried and tested with proven results in similar environments should be preferred, as some times, resistance increases when an idea is unworkable based on local culture, attitudes and structures.

*Recognition that change happens only through people is paramount to success,* also change agents in Nigeria should understand the concept of resistance, why it occurs and what can be done to overcome it. This process requires well planned communication strategies which is best represented in this Communication for Behavior Change Continuum by Cecilia Cabanero-Verzosa (2001).

## Change Theories

### Audiences along a Behaviour Change Continuum: Possible Communication Strategies



I will like to stress the importance of active audience involvement and participation in the process; this can best be represented by a feedback loop in the opposite direction. The change agents should attempt to create an ‘intellectual understanding’ of the new practices and explain to the people the underlying meanings and functions of the practices.

*Be prepared for ‘implementation dip’, apathy and resistance.* These could be caused by several factors and may also be caused by mischief makers or party opposition especially in Nigeria. Tackling apathy and resistance is more challenging than tackling ‘implementation dip’ because according to Sparks, *‘things often get worse temporarily before improvement begins to appear’?*

*Seek out and work with “paradigm shifters” and idea “champions” who are interested in change.* This concept is closely related to the Everett Rogers (2003) opinion leadership theory, he classified the general characteristics displayed by opinion leaders as follows: They have greater exposure to mass media than their followers, are more cosmopolitan, have greater contact with change agents, have greater social participation, have higher socioeconomic status, and finally are more innovative than their followers (especially when a social system favours change). The opinion leadership theory is based on the multi-step flow of communication theory which presupposes that information flows from the change agents to the opinion leaders, and from them to the other less informed and less aware members of the public, it recognises the several networks of interconnectedness in the communication process, which includes opinion leaders, family unit, peer groups, non-traditional sources and influences etc. Rogers (2003) have summed up the varying degrees of innovation adoption into the following (adopter categorization): Innovators (2.5%), Early Adopters (13.5%), Early Majority (34%), Late Majority (34%), and Laggards (16%).

Finally Sparks advises that *change agents should realize that change takes time and should not be forced to occur too quickly*, this means that they should be prepared for the long-haul strategy, this is particularly true for a country like Nigeria where things have been left to degenerate for too long.

## **Conclusion**

Change is required in any society, old procedures must be turned into new processes, many observers agree with the phrase that the only condition permanent on earth is change, while accepting such principles, there are also those that argue that if a situation is good, then why change it, these are the people that readily cite the phrase '*if it is not broken, why fix it?*', however, our immediate realities in Nigeria portend the need for radical changes in our social, economic, and political lives. The Obasanjo government has already recognised the urgency of the need for reforms and have initiated various types of reforms, it is my view that the government's reform programme will have more chances of succeeding if the government is able to involve the citizens in the reform process, the citizens should be consulted and their opinion sought before such reforms that will impact heavily in their lives are implemented, this will mean a shift from the *top-down* change management approach to a more transactional, participatory and citizenry involving *top-down-bottom-up* approach..

Finally, the government should begin to lead by examples, this requires strict accountability in governmental affairs, every individual should be subject to the law, this approach will go a long way in attracting the trust and confidence of the citizens, and also improve the credibility of the government officials and their change agents, quoting from Victor Dike (ibid), '*it takes a committed leadership to accomplish a propitious change in a society*'. That way, Alphonse Karr's observation that the more things change, the more they remain the same may no longer apply to the Nigerian situation.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



Uche Nworah is a freelance writer and brand scholar. He teaches Marketing Communications at the London Metropolitan University. He is also an EdD candidate at the University of Greenwich with research interests in diasporas, place branding and educational change management. He can be contacted on [info@uchenworah.com](mailto:info@uchenworah.com)

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