

# Public Relations Practice and Speech Writing In Sustainable Development: Meeting and Diverging Points

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## INTRODUCTION

*We need no demographer or a population expert to tell us that the world is by a single guess, being grossly over populated, and that the present generation has, more than ever before, experienced an increased and complex technological advancement with new scientific breakthroughs made each passing day. The direct effect of these developments is the multiplicity of human activities in government, public and private sectors, and the whole array of corporate organizations namely companies, firms, financial institutions/houses, media organizations transportation, shipping lines, manufacturing, building and construction industries. Human activities also, cover the whole gamut of government business, political parties, church organizations, pressure groups, academic institutions, corporative formations, world bodies, agencies, regional and non-governmental organizations, etc. Each of these human activities, in its uniqueness, requires public relations services of some sort. Each*

*requires effective co-ordination efforts, maintenance and sustenance of free and smooth flow of communication to get the production or organization working at capacity level.*

Effective and uninterrupted communication management is a *sine qua non* in our daily endeavours, without which all our efforts will be a bunch of miscalculation and non-sense. It is at this point that the public relations roles come into play. The public relations practitioner does the communication management work. He mediates between the corporate organization and the rest of the public; he opens up channels of effective communication to bring about the desired level of results.

As earlier noted, human activities and demands are today more intricate and complex than they used to be some five decades ago, and will get more complex as we step into the upcoming decades. All these call for greater public relations

involvements to ensure greater efficiency, increased productivity and stabilization of vital human tasks. Reputation managers and public relations practitioners are faced with greater challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century - a century that has witnessed an increased awareness and relationship between product and corporate reputation, including gross multiplication of human activities. Thus, if there is anytime the services of public relations should be more relevant and appreciated, it is now. For any business-minded enterprise or organization to meet the challenges of the time, it must have to employ effective public relations strategies to safeguard and promote its wares<sup>1</sup>. This is the reality and where this is absolutely non-existent, the result is predictable. It leads to a gradual and sometimes, to quick collapse of the system due to non-performance resulting from lack of effective co-ordination efforts. Besides, in a world that has been compressed to a global village and gone internet, the tendency is for a badly packaged product or poorly managed organization to quickly find its way to the public debate through the new instantaneous communication technology and, eventually into the mass media radio, television and press<sup>2</sup>. This brings further, greater damage

to either the product or the organization's reputation.

With this brief exposition of the relevance of the public relations management in our world's ever-increasing human activities, efforts will now be made to examine the relationships between Public Relations and Speech Communications; their roles in sustainable development as well as their meeting and diverging points. This is being discussed with special reference to Nigeria environment.

### **The Concept of Public Relations Practice**

Public Relations practice is the art of communicating ideas and facts or information to promote better understanding. It is a deliberate, planned and a sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and the public. Modern exponents of public relations conceive the concept to be a science related discipline, which analyses trends, predicts their consequences and advises the corporate organization on the effective and planned programme to follow. As a science, public relations is concerned with recognizing public sentiments and concerns and responding to them promptly and

appropriately to prevent crisis situations and nurture a long lasting friendly relationship. It is today studied as an independent discipline in some universities of the world like the University of London. Happily enough, the Enugu State University of Technology has included NIPR Diploma into its broad-based professionals MBA programme. The idea is to bring theory and practice together to sharpen the intellectual horizon, professional skill and experience of public relations professionals; and to make them more functional, creative and competent in handling the intricacies of communications in modern organizations. Ikechukwu Nwose clearly and succinctly explains modern Public Relations Practice from the Nigerian context to involve:

*Research communications, complex activities and evaluation, that involves doing right and talking about it, all in a planned and systematic manner... and that Public Relations in Government means effective persuasion, effective competition, winning support for legislations, decrees and policies, winning and sustaining loyalty, good citizenship; and respect for government, building patriotism and unity, combating and upsetting false propaganda against negative attitudes to government programmes... Ensuring steady two-way flow of information between the*

*rulers and the ruled, building good image for the government outside our national frontiers, achieving and sustaining media understanding and co-operation and a lot more<sup>3</sup>.*

### **Who is a Public Relations Practitioner?**

Public Relations Practitioner is a professional Communication Manager, a research specialist, well-grounded in journalism, speech-making, press relations, social psychology, economics, business practice and related disciplines<sup>4</sup>. The public relations practitioner studies the organization's policies and trends of development with special reference to public needs and attitudes; creating friendly relations with the general public; stimulates public appreciation and understanding of the objectives and aims of the business; controls external contacts in order to reduce misunderstanding; favorably influences public opinion and goodwill to bring about better stockholder-customer-and-creditor-relationships; lessens industrial disputes for favourable government consideration; serves as an interpreter; speech writer and assimilator of information and adviser to company's top management.

The Public Relations Officer is the image-maker of a corporate set-up or government. He is the one who soothes

hostilities within the organization and outside of it. He is more or less a salesman, exporting the company's policies to the larger society by various means of communication outlets such as the newspapers, radios, televisions, public speeches, bulletins and exhibitions. He conducts a continual educational programme from the public view-point to acquaint employees, stockholders, customers, creditors, and indeed, the general community with the soundness of company practices and policies. Public relations persons design a programme plan to gain acceptance of the firm's practices and objectives<sup>5</sup>. When things go negative in the organization, most likely some management axioms must have been wronged, it behoves the public relations man to put the general public in the know and in a correct light and situation, regarding the organization's set-objectives. In this way, Pita Ejiofo noted, the Public Relations man functions as a partner in "management by objectives" (MBO)<sup>6</sup>.

In essence, Public Relation Officer is a diplomat of a kind, likened to an ambassador plenipotentiary, promoting the good-will of his country to the outside world. The Public Relations Practitioner forges social and business links with

external groups, individuals and organizations. The Public Relations Officer does his job well when he tells you "go to hell" in such a way that you actually look forward to the trip. By this I mean that, he should personify social and communication skills. The aura around him should radiate and be contagious. He enters the room or stage, it lightens up. The afflatus about him should be palpable. He should exude and maintain corporate image. His mode of speaking, his carriage and dressing should speak for themselves.

An attempt here is not being made to consciously paint a picture of Plato's "Philosopher King" of a Public Relations Officer. However, all that is being portrayed is that, a public relations man should be sensitive as well as feel the heart-beat of the people. He makes you want to remain in the group if you are in it and wish to join if you are outside it. He therefore, cannot do this without a magnetic field about his personality. He is such a person who appreciates when silence speaks not underestimate the potency of his weapons-the PEN, which is mightier than the sword and of course, TONGUE in which resides "the power of life and death" "Proverbs 18:21.

## **Speech Writing or Speech Communication**

According to Remmy Asoegwu, Speech communication or writing is an art involving the task of preparing formal and public speeches, addresses or releases presented to people at public occasions by public officials; in the case of government by the Chief Executive, who with his team of professionals, indulge in constant research in order to produce befitting speeches for the Chief Executive<sup>7</sup>.

About six conventional steps are taken in the articulation and production of standard speeches for public occasions which include:

- choosing and adapting the subject with focus on the purpose or nature of the occasion;
- developing and limiting the scope of speech;
- structuring /developing the ideas. This entails the organization of ideas, making use of in-puts/materials;
- proof-reading and rehearsal of the prepared speech;
- delivering the speech, which involves the task of reading out the speech to the target listeners,

audience or receivers. This stage is very crucial as no speech is considered a speech until it has been finally delivered to the targeted audience; and

- the stage of speech evaluation, which involves the task of monitoring, doing a kind of post-humors analysis of the speech,

### **Classification of Speeches:**

Speeches are classified according to the capacity and quality of the audience or receivers they are meant to serve. Therefore, you have major and minor speeches. In major speeches, you anticipate a larger and perhaps, a more mixed-up audience comprising; intellectuals, local people and people from diverse ethnic backgrounds and nationalities. It is usually an occasion for a large crowd. Speeches delivered at such occasions may take the form of matriculation, convocation, NYSC orientation, Independence Day, synod, seminar, workshop, conference, trade fair, annual festivals, receptions and book launch speeches, etc. Also inclusive are speeches for big rallies, familiarization or state visits. Sometimes, big-time occasions may require conference writing, where two or three

speech communicators put heads together and knock out a good and punchy speech. However, nothing stops an experienced speech writer from going it alone if he has all the time and wits, but where there is time constraints, he can employ the services of other experts since two heads are better than one, they say.

Minor speeches may refer to occasions where small crowd is anticipated and which requires no serious and elaborate protocol. Such speeches include: inauguration, induction/swearing-in, project-commissioning, foundation -laying stone, minor social visits, etc. In some cases however, some of these occasions may call for major speeches depending again, on publicity accorded to it and size of the crowd; then again it depends on the whims and caprices of the Chief Executive, who may decide not to make use of a prepared speech but to speak extempore i.e. with a written speech.

### **General Focus, Purpose/Objectives of a Speech**

Just as each speech production undergoes several stages, each speech has a purpose, focus or objectives it tends to achieve. This

means that some speeches are designed to (a) inform (b) persuade or (c) entertain.

It is informing when you want to increase your receivers' or listeners' knowledge about your subject. Example, the Chief Executive addressing the people telling them of his administration's policies, actions, manifestoes and programmes he wants them to know.

It is persuasive/persuading when the purpose is to change your listeners' mind or cause them to take some actions. Consider the Chief Executive telling people to identify with programmes like the Green revolution, SAP, JAD or PAP, Transformation agenda, etc. It is entertaining when the purpose is to make your audience enjoy hearing what you say. Most rhetoric's speak to entertain and in most of their speeches, they like to elicit response from their receivers. H. Mifflin notes that some speeches meant to inform or to persuade also, include entertaining moments<sup>8</sup>. Most political speeches have this tripartite characteristic.

### **Who Is a Speech Writer/Communicator?**

The speech writer or communicator is one who uses his power of the pen to weave facts together into a speech form. He should

have the attributes of reading the lips, the mannerism and the gesture of the presenting public officers. He should, as well read the minds of the receiving audience. According to Remmy Asogwu in his *Protocol Management*:

*It is not merely writing but writing to suit His Excellency's ideas and pattern of governance... Any utterance made in the public by any governor is automatically a policy statement (and) that is why a good speech writer must make a careful study of the subject matter he wants to write on so as not to commit the government unduly<sup>9</sup>*

A Speech Writer should be able to understand the needs of the target audience and address such needs. In the words of C.L. Book *et al*, "a good Speech Writer should be able to state his beliefs as accurately and honestly as possible, while at the same time holding his listeners' attention and keep their minds on and receptive"<sup>10</sup>. He should be mindful of the sex, age, race, place of residence, and of course, the cultural and socio-political level of the audience. Knowledge of group membership of receivers is necessary in order to effectively communicate along. Whether he is writing to inform, persuade or to entertain, he

should make his message clear, trying to understand audience before, during and after the speech has been delivered in the following areas: their attitude, their knowledge, and their potential or actual behaviors towards the purpose of the speech. This means he should read the reaction of the audience which implies speech monitoring or evaluation, usually done after speech delivery.

The inputs of a writer should reflect not only what the presenter would want to inform the audience but also, what the audience would love to hear. What the receivers think about the source is equally important, and should write 'inspiring, moving and punchy' speeches to prepare the presenter adequately. A speaker with low credibility will unlikely move the audience to action. The speech writer can make and unmake a leader. When he writes to make a leader, his speech will be one which has 'the ability to make people do what they do not want to do and yet like it' Harry Truman's. A speech well written and delivered can thrill and hold the audience spell bound.

The speech writer is one who is able to suit communication to purpose. He should not be one who rests on his oars or laurels but goes out to monitor the effect of his

production or speech on the masses with a view to making necessary adjustments when his speeches are delivered. This is done specifically to assess audience reaction, to know how difficult or unfamiliar words were pronounced and to know how composed the speaker was when rendering a particular speech.

A good speech writer is conscious of his opening speeches. Since speech writing is very important and a routine affair he varies his approaches and styles, especially with regard to his opening sentences. For example, he does not have to start with the same 'run-ins' all the time. It is common feature seeing such words and phrases as I am delighted; I feel elated; it is my pleasure, it is my honour, etc. He should try to avoid familiar phrases and words and try something new and unique with each new speech. Common phrases could be 'bugging' and most public officers or Chief Executives complain of this.

However, your strategy in arriving at good introduction and finally good speech, may depend upon one's ability to get the attention of his listeners. This can be achieved by opening your speech in a powerful and interesting way, making your audiences eager or wanting to hear you. You

may wish to start with a quotation or a question in this regard. Always make your topic sound, limited and interesting and show your audience that such topic matters to them so much that they have something to gain from it.

Your concluding remarks are equally very important and should add tonic to a good speech. So, as all that begins well ends well, a good speech writer should strive to land safely. Many good speeches have been marred by poor-landing conclusions. Different kinds of speeches require different kinds of conclusions. If your original purpose is to inform, you may end by 'summing up', to persuade you may end by 'calling to attention' or make strong restatement of your opinion, and if your purpose is to entertain, you may end with a 'story or a question'.

### **Packaging the Presenter or the Public Officer**

Packaging or getting the presenter ready for speech delivering is equally a big task. It is part of the speech writer's job. He may however, encounter some problems, especially where and when the Chief Executive is naturally articulate, well-informed and possess the power of oration

and rhetoric. A Speech Writer has to understand the presenter very well and help to adjust him. Most speakers feel nervous before the audience. Part of the packaging entails getting the Speech well-prepared. In this way, you will help in reducing tension or the nervousness.

Packaging also entails doing the speech in a draft form and allowing the presenter to have preview of it, make his own inputs and ask questions to clear cloudy statements or ideas. It is good to do a rehearsal as this will help the presenter feel more confident and relaxed. In some cases, you may read out the speech to the presenter and identify areas requiring emphasis. The final speech should be prepared in quality and presentable paper to make it look aesthetic. In Government House, glossy papers adorned with golden crescent are used and the process is called 'firming'

In some cases, some presenters or Chief Executives opt to speak extempore, i.e. without a formal written speech. They are speakers you cannot limit and who feel bored giving stereotyped and memorized speeches or reading word-for-word speeches. You can still go ahead and do a highlight of the speech to enable such speakers exhaust their points. You can use

note cards in preparing such highlights or summaries bringing up the introduction, important phrases, subheadings and supporting details as guides.

### **Meetindaaatrttttg And Diverging Points Of Public Relations Practice And Speech Communications**

The task here is to compare both human tasks, identify their common denominator and points of divergence with particular reference to our own Nigerian experience. From the analysis of the public relations operational functions and that of the speech communications, one would freely say that both concepts are like the two sides of the same coin. Both are in communication management. While the Public Relations Officer reaches the audience frontally, speech communications reaches it via other personalities. Their roles in the use of communication to co-ordinate functions and tasks in corporate organizations to achieve capacity results, are very significant and indispensable. Communication management is the bedrock of human development and civilization. According to Prof. Joseph De Vito, "it portents man's ability to share experiences, exchange ideas and transmit

knowledge from one generation to another”<sup>11</sup>.

Also, in the words of Frank Ugboaja:

*To be is to communicate, without communication man is not different from the lower animals. Our ability to carry symbols around with us, to interpret them and relate them around, makes us distinct. Without communication, man will cease to exist as social creatures because communication is a social affair*<sup>12</sup>.

Since this paper is not primarily concerned about the etiology of communication or similar abstruse communication theories, all that is intended to be done is to identify the place of communication in human development and point out how both practitioners, the Public Relations Officers and Speech Writers, employ communication as their effective tool in their daily assignments. Experts show that 90% of the time of top management hierarchy in corporate set ups, is spent in one form of communication or the other. The more effectively a manager communicates, the more efficiently he

performs on his task. According to Peter F. Druker, a famous management consultant:

*No matter whether the manager's job is engineering, accounting or selling, his effectiveness depends on his ability to listen and read, or his ability to speak and write... This is the common ground of the Public Relations Officer and the Speech Writer and indeed the meeting point of other top level managers. What it means is that the effectiveness of a Public Relations Officer, a Speech Writer or any manager whether in government or corporate organization largely and primarily depends on his effectiveness as an effective communication*<sup>13</sup>.

The two operators are involved in one common business of packaging their products, firms or organizations in good image, to the outsiders, customers and the general public. Nelda R. Lawrence makes it clearer when he said:

*in business, a person's task as a writer takes equal rank with his assigned title, whatever that may be, you are an Engineer-Writer, a personnel manager-writer, an accountant-writer, when a company defines the various positions in the organization, it takes for granted that one routine function of each person is to communicate appropriately with everyone in his circle of influence—above, below and on the same level*

*as his own job. Furthermore, the responsibility of contracting persons outside your own company obligates you to present the company's views with sincerity, with facts, and with effective expression because to the outside reader you are the company. So your job has two parts, doing something and telling about it<sup>14</sup>.*

Therefore, both practitioners are involved in organizational communication. The Speech Communication is an integral part of Public Relations management; each professional can do either jobs, as each task should not, and cannot be regarded as belonging exclusively to any of the two – the Public Relations Department or Speech Communications Department. There is a very true sense in which virtually each consultant in a particular organization has some communication to do, however, insignificant the person, however menial his job. The earlier this fact is realized, the easier Public Relations Management and Speech Communications Department would be acknowledged as an integral part of effective communication more than the hazy attention they now appear to be given in many corporate organizations and government circles. In almost all our nations' universities, the two disciplines are

not yet considered in either the Business Management Programme or in the post-graduate studies – English or Mass Communication Departments as case may be. Speech Writing and Public Relations Practice are not yet studied in institutions of higher learning and that is the point being made. This is a serious omission that must be given a serious thought by our curriculum planners. However, thanks to ESUTH that has promised to start something in this regard for Public Relations, but what about Speech Communications? The Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, makes efforts in this direction but this is only limited to organizing seminars and workshops for speech writers.

#### **Attributes of the Speech Writer/Public Relations Officer:**

**Intellectual Diversity:** A Speech Writer or Public Relations Officer should be an intellectual omnibus, an intellectual powerhouse of the organization. He should not be one averse to any field of study or human endeavor because there is no subject on which he would not have occasion to consult.

**Mastery of Language:** Interaction between a Speech Writer or Public Relations Officer

and his language should be comparable to that between a skilled workman and his tools, applying economy of words so as not to sound verbose or boring. He should write to flare up passions or soothe the nerves, depending on the circumstances. He does all these skillfully, exhibiting simplicity, clarity and readability, all of which make for effective writing. Thus, William Strunk and E.B. White, advise that:

*A conscientious writer in his write-up, should strive weaving 'a sentence that contains no unnecessary words, a paragraph with no unnecessary sentences for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and machines no unnecessary parts'<sup>15</sup>.*

In the same manner, Charles Ryan would advise that a good speech writer should, in his presentation, be concise and avoid what is called 'gobbled gook' – the jargon of business men and civil servants and the use of high-falutin, high sounding and high-flow language. Example, Birds of "identical plumage congregate at equal proximity". His success is when the audience goes home not just saying what a lovely message but that, we must do something<sup>16</sup>.

**Sense of Humour:** a communicator, whether as a Public Relation Officer or a Speech Writer can only be as effective as he is humorous. Good humour is like a key that opens all doors. The Igbo adage says that 'the snail is able to gloss over thorns with the aid of its wet tongue.'

**Innovativeness:** A communicator is like a physician treating different ailments. He thus, administers different antidotes for different diseases. Even for the same ailments, there could be disease resistance to a particular drug. In the same vein, the communicator varies his package to suit his situation and circumstance.

**Comportment:** The general appearance of the communicator whether a public Relations Officer or a Speech Writer is as important as his message. He should carry himself with confidence without appearing over-bearing or like an impostor.

### **Problems of the Public Relations Practitioner**

Just as these two have some common denominator in the discharge of their communication management duties, the two are equally fraught with some problems. This is not strange as each occupation has its own hazards. The problems range from

interactive problems to confusion between them and mass communication, and it is becoming problematic to distinguish between Public Relations and Mass Communication even though the latter is a tool of the former in the dissemination of its varied duties. There is also the problem of the people treating public relations as a means of conning the press as a smokers screen on firefighting exercise whenever there is trouble<sup>17</sup>. There is the problem of identification principle – the problem of action principle and clarity principles.

Generally speaking, some people have often regarded Public Relations to mean the job that publicises frequent press releases and other window dressings by which the organisation is able to hide its true colour. What is common however, is that the Public Relations Manager is expected to help get things going, and in the course of his job, he is able to decide events fairly quickly, able to put an argument when he does not agree with a view, able to remain fairly firm or certain in his judgment, able to introduce others rather than wait to be introduced, able to tell the polite falsehood if need be, able to find out all about a new idea, able to change his plans when a new situation comes up, able to remain original

in his scheme of living, able to join the talk of the group as a guest, able to share his knowledge, able to work hard and be at his best in dealing with unexpected and be able to have a pretty definite opinion about matters that come his way.

In essence, Public Relations Practitioners shall never be seen as a cost but as a go-getter for the organization. Part of the problem, especially in government Public Relations is that, the Public Relations and Information Professionals do not assume the right place in the scheme of things in their various ministries and departments. However, a good and efficient Public Relations man knows and insists that the Public Relations man is right inside top administration or management<sup>18</sup>.

### **Problems of Speech Communicators/ Writers**

Speech Communication, in itself is a delicate, sensitive, and tasking occupation. Speech Writers perform their job behind the screen and stand the risk of being ignobly sidelined, jolted or fired on a single mistake. Like the Public Relations Management, most governments and corporate organizations are yet to fully appreciate and recognize the crucial role of Speech

Communications Department as an important image-making outfit of government in Africa and in Nigeria in particular.

**Conclusion:**

As communication consultants or practitioners serving identical functions as the eyes of their organization, the Public Relations Officers and the Speech Communicators should be given the necessary logistic, administrative and other material support by organizations concerned. They can be made to improve their strategies and tactical skills, as well as broaden their professional expertise through participation in seminars, conferences, workshops, talks organized locally, nationally and internationally. This will provide them with a wider understanding of the latest thinking in strategic Public Relations Practice worldwide. It will also offer them the opportunity to share experience and information network with Senior Public Relations Executives around the globe<sup>19</sup>.

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