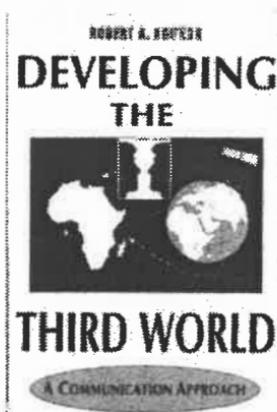# Developing the Third World: A Communication Approach

Agunga, Robert A. (1997). Commack, NY: Nova Science Publishers. Inc. 346 pp.

It takes no gift of prophesy to predict the way many development communication practitioners the world over will react to Robert Agunga's *Developing the Third World: A Communication Approach.* They'll greet the book with the kind of glee we all feel when somebody out there finally scores a hit for *our* side.

At last, after years of grousing about why some countries remain underdeveloped—their people's slackness, their attitudes, the tyranny of policies imposed by lender countries, the legacies of colonialism—we have an advocate, a "Third Worlder" with the wit and the wisdom of a development "insider."

In this volume, Agunga acknowledges that development work is essentially messy. The nice twist about it is, unlike much of the available development literature, he doesn't just stop there. Perhaps tired of such oft-repeated questions as "Can Africa develop?", Agunga sets out to answer exactly *why* and *how* it can be done.

A spokesman for the embattled communicator, Agunga, who grew up in Africa and actually had his hands muddied and clothes soiled in development projects before becoming a professor at Ohio State, presumably knows whereof he speaks. Experiencing development first hand, he boldly espouses a strategy cognizant of the multi-disciplinary nature of the

development beast and declares that a people-centered communication strategy is the solution.

What it boils down to, Agunga writes, is a recognition that development is a complex and dynamic process and, as such, can immensely benefit from the unifying and synergistic forces of willing and able communicators. In Part One of his book, he settles the dispute over the political correctness of the field's lexicon. Defining *development* and linking it to the geopolitical history of the Third World, he starts macro with an analysis of how development work got caught in the intricate web of Cold War politics.

To unveil and explain the role of communication in a mesh of causal and intervening variables, Agunga not only calls upon his own and others' experiences in the field but also relies heavily on credible scholarship, citing a broad range of social, educational and communication theories. In Part Two of his book, Agunga lays down his central arguments and his proposed solutions, well constructed and mostly persuasive.

The book has the resonance of the real thing. Too much of it rings true to be dismissed as one man's imaginative formula to "lift developing countries by their bootstraps." Agunga's chapter on possible solutions to the development crisis—some more realistic than others, no doubt—is at the very least provocative. (Rather than simply transmitting knowledge in the old fashioned way, tomorrow's development communicators, he suggests, would lead their audiences toward it by helping them define their own solutions and their own exigencies.)

In sum, Agunga's book deserves attention from all of us who share the feeling that communicators could give far more to the development process.

For too long, we have tended to look only at the information that is available, treating information as a *demand* rather than a *supply* concept. Agunga prompts us to look at people's problems, what is required to solve these problems, what kind of communication can help, and who ought to provide it.

So here is a book about how nations can develop, based on theoretical perspectives, written by someone from the "South," that is intended to be practically useful to the communicator out there in the field, the campaign designer, the trainer, the professor in both the graduate and undergraduate levels, and

the policy-maker. These potential audience groups will certainly find its lessons learned to be interesting and of practical value in guiding development work and its study.

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