

## THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS IN A NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION: A CASE STUDY OF TEN SELECTED CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN MAIDUGURI

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### ABSTRACT

*The study set out to examine the role of public Relations in a non-governmental organization, using ten selected Christian Churches as a case study. The objectives of the study are to examine the nature and practice of Public Relations in NGOs with particular reference to Christian Churches, how Public Relations can be used in propagating the image of Christian Churches in Maiduguri, to identify likely problems Churches encountered in the use of Public Relations and recommend ways of improving Public Relations practice within and outside the selected Christian Churches in Maiduguri. The study found out that 50% of the respondents said they do not have functional Public Relations unit in their Churches. 40% of those who responded said they used video coverage of programmes to publicize the Church activities, while another 88.89% of the respondents said they used public Relations to propagate the gospel. The study found out that finance, lack of PR expertise, the size of the Church and ignorance were the major problems associated with Public Relations practice in churches. Solution proffered for these problems include: allocation of enough fund, training leaders, creating awareness and reorganization of administrative structure. Among other things the study recommended that each department in a Christian Church should have Public Relations unit apart from the Public Relations unit of the Church. By so doing each arm of the church will attract members of the external public to become members of the church. The study concluded that to avoid Christian Church activities from being shrouded in secrecy, Christian Churches no matter their size should have Public Relations units to publicize the Church activities using the most widely acceptable medium.*

**Keywords:** Public Relations, NGOs, Church

### INTRODUCTION

This study examines the role of Public Relations practice in ten Christian churches in Maiduguri, namely: National Evangelical Church, Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN), Assemblies of God Church, Church of God Mission, Good News Church, Wisdom Church, Chapel of Grace, University of Maiduguri, First Baptist Church, Deeper Life Church and International Praise Church.

Many Nigerians are now aware of the need to come closer to their maker. This has led to the influx of people to churches. Consequently, many churches were established to accommodate them. The Nigerian society is made up of almost 300 tribes spread all over the nation. No single Church is made up of one tribal group. Therefore, the need for Public Relations in all Christian Churches becomes crucial. Public Relations therefore should aim at securing understanding, mutual trust and cooperation between the pastor and church members on the one hand, and between the Church and the community on the other.

According to Onaji (2001, p.23), "Public Relations is concerned with how and what others think about you as a person or an organization." All persons who attend a Church or have one thing or the other to do with her have a view of that Church. Their views may either be good or bad. The growth of any church hinges on either of these two. If a church and her pastors are viewed in bad light, the growth of such a church would be stunted, while the contrary would apply to any church that is viewed in a good light by the public. The ideal thing is for the community in which the Church is

located to think well of her members and Pastors. On account of this, it is important that Churches according to Onaji (2001, p.29), “generate good Public Relations and remain in good public view.”

The British Institute of Public Relations (IPR) defines Public Relations Practice as “deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its publics” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984 p.7).

Another definition was provided by the Public Relations practitioners at a world conference in Mexico City in 1978. At the end of the conference, they came out with what is popularly called the Mexican statement. The statement stated that “Public Relations Practice is the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting its consequences, counseling organizations and the public interests” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984 p.7).

Another comprehensive definition of Public Relations is the one given by Public Relations News, and quoted by Belch & Belch, (1998, p.578). it stated that, it is “the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an organization with the public interest, executes a program of action and communication to earn public understanding and acceptance”.

This study intends to find out whether Christian Churches use Public Relations in their day-to-day running of the Churches and how effective.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What is the nature of Public Relations practice in the selected Christian Churches in Maiduguri?
2. What role do Public Relations play in the day-to-day administration of the selected Christian Churches in Maiduguri?
3. What are the problems associated with Public Relations Practice in the selected Christian Churches in Maiduguri?
4. How can these problems be overcome?

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To examine the nature and practice of Public Relations in Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) with particular reference to selected Christian Churches in Maiduguri.
2. To examine how Public Relations can be used in promoting the image of Christian Churches in Maiduguri.
3. To identify the likely problems that Christian Churches may encounter in the use of Public Relations practice.
4. To recommend ways of improving Public Relations practice within and outside the selected Christian Churches in Maiduguri.

### **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The study is limited to ten Churches within Maiduguri. The areas chosen for this study are GRA Polo & Wulari, Jerusalem in Maiduguri municipal Council and University of Maiduguri in Jere local Government Area in the capital of Borno state.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The immense contribution of Public Relations will be appreciated within Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) especially Christian Churches considering the role Christian Churches play in shaping the life of many Nigerians.

It would help Pastors to use Public Relations to enhance their work of pasturing and to create mutual understanding and trust between the pastorate and the members as well as the outside publics. It is hoped that skeptics of the Church could be won over. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) will also benefit immensely from this study.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Every organization needs Public Relations to survive in a competitive world as ours. For churches to survive and grow and also affect the community in which they are located, the use of Public Relations is imperative.

Okereke (1993) defines Public Relations as “a top management function for company planning ... for positioning of organizations ... monitoring environmental trends and predicting their consequences.”

The purpose of Public Relations by any company or organization is to have good relations with her internal and external publics. This agrees with Hendrix (2001, p.3) that “one way of defining Public Relations has been simply to invert the term so that it becomes “relations with public.” Public Relations help organizations, be it governmental or non-governmental to achieve organizational objectives and facilitate desirable change. Lattimore *et al.*, (2004,p.5), corroborate this when they said, “Public Relations is a leadership and management function that helps achieve organizational objectives ... and facilitate organizational change.”

An effective Public Relations influences the opinion individuals or group hold towards an organization, its products and services in a positive way. Scott, M. Catlip and Allen H. Carter as quoted by Grunig & Hunt (1984, p.7) said “Public Relations is the planned effort to influence opinion through good character and responsible performance based upon mutual satisfactory two way communication.”

Marketing and advertizing are instruments for achieving Public Relations objectives and goals, but they are not in any way Public Relations. Marketing is one out of many strategies used by Public Relations to create goodwill. According to Adeyemi (1994), “when customers know about your company through a systematic Public Relations programme, the goods and services are likely to be sold faster.”

Belch (1998, p.578) in supporting this assertion referred to Public Relations activities designed to support marketing objectives as “marketing public relations (MPR) function.” According to him, “marketing objectives that may be aided by Public Relations include raising awareness, informing and educating, gaining understanding, building trust, giving consumers a reason to buy and motivating consumer acceptance.”

Maintaining good relationship and disseminating information to people and groups who have one thing or the other to do with an organization, and creating good climate for marketing its products and services is what Public Relations is all about. Encyclopaedia Britannica (2007, p.780) opines that Public Relations is concerned with creating a favourable climate for marketing good relations with merchants and distributors as well as placing products publicity and disseminating information to trade and industrial groups.”

The official statement of Public Relations formally adopted by the Public Relations Society of American Assembly on Nov. 5, 1982 also supported this view and went further to say that Public Relations serves a wide variety of institutions in a pluralistic society.

“Public Relations help our complex, pluralistic society to reach decisions and function more effectively by contributing to mutual understanding among groups and institutions. It serves to bring private and public policies into harmony.

Public Relations serves a wide variety of institutions in society such as business, trade unions, government agencies, voluntary associations, foundations, hospitals, educational and religious institutions. To achieve their goals, these institutions must develop effective relationships with many different audiences or publics such as employees, members, customers, local communities, shareholders and other institutions and with society at large” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:7).

Public Relations in Non-government Organization (NGOs) especially in Christian Churches can be described as a projection of the image of the Church. It is not possible for any organization to build a reputation without an image, so it is with Christian Churches. A Christian church is said to be a

growing organism, and for it grow as expected, it must have a good reputation in the eyes of the public.

According to Haywood (1984), "Perhaps the most satisfactory practical definition of public relations is that it is the management of corporate reputation."

Public Relations in Christian Churches can be said to be a professional way of achieving good image in order to promote success and growth or the welfare of the Churches or its members on whose behalf the public relations efforts is being made. It is therefore worthy of note to say that public relations are important to the successful operation of Christian Churches and to ensure the corporate life and existence of the Churches.

The image of a Church or her Pastor in the eyes of its public is also important if the Church or pastor is to be effective in carrying out his/her pastoral work. Jefkins (1980) also supported this when he said, "Public Relations aim at image making to foster a good image of an organization in the eyes of the public. That a bad image can be changed through a change in policy or activity and also as people learn more about the organization concerned."

Providing boreholes, schools and hospitals for the communities in which churches are located will create favourable impression in the minds of their external publics. "When it comes to good church public relations ... simply that relating to the public so as to create favourable impression" (churches leader.com).

Public Relations can also be useful to a Church for example in advising the pastors and Elders about the effectiveness of advertising and also in facilitating the publicity and news releases to media organizations in Maiduguri metropolis. Public Relations effort on the part of the Church will also assist the Senior Pastors of the Church in achieving their goals.

The purpose of Public Relations is: "To promote the church in an effective attractive and exciting manner. Developing and maintaining all communications of CRPC, advising the Executive and administrator about advertising effectiveness. Facilitating the publicity and news releases of media and assisting the senior Pastor to achieve his goals" (Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, 2003).

The central reason why Public Relations are needed in a church is for the purpose of communicating the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to its external public. This communication can be done both in words and in needs.

According to the Bishop's Institute for Social Communication Conference on "Church and public relations" held in Singapore, Sept.1-5, 1997, "Public Relations should not be seen only from a business point of view but rather as a witness of Christians and Christian communities to the values of the Kingdom of God, a proclamation through Christ-like deeds ... above all, to live like Him in the midst of our neighbours of other faith and persuasions and to do His deeds by the power of His grace. Before all other techniques, the witness of life stays central."

Public Relations in the Church can also be used to create a relationship of trust and confidence between it and her various publics.

Greer (2003) sees Public Relations in a different way. To her Public Relations means disseminating information to both its internal and external publics. "... is involved in disseminating information to church members and to the community at large. This is done in several ways; Sunday morning Announcements, public press releases and church Newsletters."

In a Church where there are crisis between the head of the Church and her members (the internal) and the external publics, good policy and sound practice, openness, justice, financial accountability and replacement of the leadership with selfless individuals may go a long way in restoring the image of the Church in the eyes of its publics.

According to Hough (2003), "often I am asked what makes for good public relations. My answer is unequivocal: good PR is a reflection of good policy and sound practice ... sell off palatial bishops' residences like those in Seattle, Chicago and Boston and give the money to the victims of abuse. These properties add nothing to the Church's mandate to preach the Gospel and stand as expensive,

effective barriers between the Bishops and reality. That's a PR programme that might work. Even better than good PR, however, would be the policy of selecting a new generation of selfless church leaders who are committed to the practice of openness, justice, financial accountability and inclusiveness. There are no two ways about it. Anything less will be a PR disaster."

Public Relations can also be employed by various departments or sections of a church or of an organization to achieve their goals. The Church of God in Christ Women's department District Missionary, use Public Relations to promote their organizations.

According to the Women's Handbook (1989) of the Church of God in Christ, "it is the duty of the Public Relations Department to issue news releases to all media, arrange press conferences, and arrange for publication of books telling the history of the organization, film and motion pictures. Make certain that convention activities are reported before, during and after the convention. Select photographers for all important events. The Public Relations department or organ of the Church should provide materials in cooperation with the program committee for advanced distribution to delegates ... other duties are to promote the Women's Department, publicize the conventions, state and national, thus creating a desire for the public as well as members to attend."

## METHODOLOGY

The instrument for data collection for this study is self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire comprises four questions on various aspects relating to the topic of the study. 150 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to Pastors, Evangelists, Chaplains, Elders, Administrator, Secretaries, Chairmen of committees, Coordinators, Departmental heads, Unit heads and various group leaders in the ten selected Christian Churches. These individuals constitute the management team of these Churches.

The entire questionnaire were correctly filled and returned by the respondents.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

**Table 1. Functions of Public Relations Unit in Churches where available**

Response	Count	Percentage
Video coverage of programmes on TV	30	40.00
Visitation and telephone calls	15	20.00
Handbills	15	20.00
Posters	15	20.00
No response	75	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Out of the total number of respondents that answered the interview questions, majority (40.0%) said that Public Relations Unit, in their Churches used video coverage of Church programmes on Local Television Station, especially the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Maiduguri, to publicize the activities of the churches and to create goodwill and mutual understanding between the churches and their external public. 20.0% of the respondents said that making contacts with new comers and new converts through visitation and telephone calls were what the Public Relations Units of their Churches does. Another 20.0% of the respondents said that they used Handbills during special programmes in their Churches to inform members of their external public. The remaining 20.0% said that they publicize the activities of their Churches through the use of posters to mobilize both their internal and external publics.

**Table 2. The use of Public Relations to propagate the gospel**

Response	Count	Percentage
Yes	120	88.89
No	15	11.11
No response	15	-

Out of the total number of respondents that answered the interview question, majority (88.89%) said that they used Public Relations to propagate the Gospel. The remaining 11.11% respondents said that they do not use Public Relations to propagate the Gospel.

**Table 3. Problems associated with Public Relations practice in Churches**

Response	Count	Percentage
Finance	135	34.62
Lack of Public Relations expertise	120	30.77
size of the Church	75	19.23
Ignorance	60	15.38
<b>Total</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Out of the total number of respondents, majority (34.62%) said that finance was the problem associated with Public Relations practice in their Churches, 30.77% said that lack of Public Relations expertise in the Churches was their problem. While 19.23 said that the size of the Church was the problem. The remaining 15.38% said that ignorance of the role Public Relations can play in the churches was their problem.

**Table 4. Proffered solution to problems of Public Relations in Churches**

Response	Count	Percentage
Allocation of enough fund	135	29.02
Training of leaders	120	25.81
Creating awareness	120	25.81
Reorganization of administrative structure	90	19.36
<b>Total</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Out of the total number of respondents that answered the interview question, majority (29.02%) said that allocating enough fund for Public Relations units would solve the problems associated with Public Relations practice in their Churches. 25.81% said that training the Church leadership would solve the problems of Public Relations in their Churches. Another 25.81% said that creating awareness on the role of Public Relations can play in their churches could be the solution. The remaining 19.36% said that reorganization of the administrative structure of the Churches could be the solution to the problem.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

In table 1, 50.0% of the total number of respondents did not respond to the interview question as compared to the remaining 50.0% that did. Therefore the interview question answered research question 1 and research objective I.

In table 2 of the total number of expected respondents only 70.0% responded, 30.0% did not. 88.89% of those who responded used Public Relations to propagate the gospel while 11.11% said that they did not use Public Relations to propagate the gospel in Churches.

This interview question answered the research question II and research objective II

In table 3 majorities (34.62%) said that finance was the problem associated with the practice of Public Relations in Churches, 30.77% said that it was lack of Public Relations expertise, 19.23% said that the problem associate with public Relations was the size of the Churches. The remaining 15.38% said that it was ignorance of the role; Public Relations can play in the Churches. This interview question therefore addresses research question III and research objective III.

Table 4, majority (29.02%) said that allocation of enough fund was the solution. 25.81% suggested the training of Church leaders. Another 25.81% said that creating awareness of the role of Public Relations in Churches was the solution. The remaining 19.36% said that the reorganization of the administrative structure of the Churches was the solution to the problems associated with Public Relations practice in Churches. This interview question addresses research objective IV and research question IV.

### **SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATION**

From the analysis carried out, there is a need for improvement in the area of Public Relations in Christian Churches in Maiduguri. The Christian leadership in Maiduguri will do better if Public Relations is employed in the day-to-day running of their Churches.

50% of the respondents did not indicate they have functional Public Relations unit in their Churches. The following suggestions and recommendations, if well applied in Christian Churches in Maiduguri, will bring about attitudinal change from hostility to acceptance of the gospel of Christ by members of the external public.

1. Public Relations in a Christian church are about creating favourable image of the church to her external public. Each church should establish where possible, programmed activities like clinics, schools and small scale business to engage the unemployed youth in the community and the provision of boreholes.
2. Ignorance of the role of Public Relations in a Christian Church was identified as a problem. Awareness among the Church leaders on the role Public Relations can play in bringing about the growth of a Church should be created by the Pastors and overseers.
3. Each department in a Christian Church should have Public Relations Unit apart from the Public Relations Unit of the Church. This becomes necessary as each arm of the Church can attract members of the external public to become part of the Church.
4. Street evangelism and tract distribution should not only be done by Christian Churches but also Bible distribution should be included.
5. Finance is another major problem facing the practice of Public Relations in Christian Churches in Maiduguri. Churches should devote a reasonable percentage of their funds to Public Relations activities.
6. Sign-posts are very important directional guides; Churches should not only construct them but they should also be attractive and placed in strategic places where members of the internal and external publics can see them.
7. The use of the media by the Christian Churches is also necessary, especially during visitation to prisons and motherless homes or even when donations are made to police or civil organizations.
8. Scholarship in form of grants should be given to members of the internal and external publics by Christian Churches to enable youths who may not have the resources to further their studies in higher institutions to do so.

### **CONCLUSION**

The role of Public Relations in non-governmental organizations especially a Christian Church is enormous. Unfortunately however, Public Relations is not being applied by many Christian Churches in Maiduguri. This is as a result of ignorance, low level of education on the part of the leadership, lack of funds and lack of Public Relations expertise.

However, some of the Christian churches who used Public Relations in the administration of their Churches have shown that Public Relations, when well applied, can create goodwill and mutual understanding between the church and her external public. Such Christian Churches are not only well known in Maiduguri but also are experiencing growth. To avoid Christian Church activities from being shrouded in secrecy, it is therefore recommended that every Christian Church in Maiduguri, no matter their size should have Public Relations Unit. Such a unit will publicize the Church activities using the most widely acceptable medium. In this way controversy surrounding certain Churches in Nigeria can be cleared and the public well enlightened.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it can be said that Public Relations is now an integral part of any successful organization just like computerization, and the Christian Churches cannot afford to be left out.

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