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# Origin, Definition and Guidelines for the Practice of Public Relations in Nigeria

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## Introduction

Public relations is the act of reputation building and it is as old as man. The real meaning of public relations (the relationship between organisations and the publics) and the promotion of public relations as a profession and career were not very clear until the recent past when public relations practice, programmes and activities were considered as powerful tools for coordinating human and business image (Achison, 2005).

Public relations is generally believed to influence public opinion or attitudes in such a positive direction, as it ensures goodwill, understanding and acceptance. The main purpose of public relations therefore is to establish and maintain a two-way communication in order to continuously ensure understanding, or resolve conflicts of interests between individuals, institutions, organisations and its publics. According to Achison (ibid.) public relations is often used in the following senses:

- i. relationship with individuals or groups, which comprises an organisation's publics;

- ii. ways and means used to achieve favourable relationship with any of the sub-publics; or
- iii. the quality of an institution's relationship with its publics.

However, there are general misconceptions about what public relations is or is not. People who have these misconceptions include directors of companies, the general public and students of mass communication. These people, according to Ajala (1993:7-8) often regard public relations as:

- publicity given to political aspirants, business executives, military leaders; and others;
- a series of free meals and gifts for journalists, prospective supporters, clients and others;
- a simple means of gaining media coverage;
- a collection of publicity seeking events;
- a means of covering-up for mistakes; and
- a mechanism for personal empire building.

The concept, public relations is often confused with other fields of life. It is often confused with marketing, advertising, publicity, product promotion and propaganda. Advertising is concerned with the sale of products and services through the commercial media.

This actually could be part of public relations, but it is not what public relations is all about. Marketing and product promotion are to enhance the distribution and sales of products and services. Publicity on the other hand, is a vital tool in public relations and provides information about an organisation or a body. It is not a term that is, however, synonymous with public relations. Marketing, product promotion and publicity are also not alternative terms for public relations except that they are related.

Propaganda is another term that seems to be related with public relations, however, it lacks respect for logic, truth and sound reasoning, while public relations, on the contrary, involves telling the relevant publics the truth, because a public relations practitioner who tell lies stands the risk of losing respect and credibility and will become a source of ridicule for the press. Though, a public relations man should be well dressed and presentable, yet, it is not just a parade of overdressed individuals. If all these are not what public relations mean, what then is public relations? *Webster New International Dictionary* 3rd edition (2002) defines public relations as:

- i. the promotion of rapport and goodwill between a person, individuals, firms or institutions and other persons specifically publics or community at large, through the distribution of interpretative materials; and assessment of public relations;
- ii. the degrees of understanding and goodwill achieved between an individual, organisation or institution and the publics;
- iii. the application of the technique for achieving this reaction; and
- iv. the art or science of developing reciprocal understanding and good will.

There are other definitions that have, however, addressed the concept more clearly and given better understanding of it. One of the most accepted definitions of the term is that of the British Institute of Public Relations, which defines it as: 'the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics.'

From the above definition, four functions, according to Achison (ibid.) can be implied. They are:

- i. to ascertain and evaluate public opinion as it relates to an organisation;
- ii. to counsel executives on ways of dealing with opinion as it exists;

- iii. to use various communication tools to influence public opinion; and
- iv. to devise and implement programmes that will gain favourable interpretation of the organisations' policies and operations.

Another definition that has come to be accepted is the one that has been widely referred to as the Mexican Declaration. In 1978, the public relations associations worldwide met in Mexico city and adopted the following definition: 'public relations is the art and science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisation's leadership and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both an organisation and the publics' interest.'

*Public Relations News* cited by Okoro, Udeze & Agbo (1999) has defined public relations as 'a management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual organisation with the public interest and plans and executes programmes with the purpose to earn public understanding and acceptance.'

From this definition, according to them, public relations practice involves:

- i. anticipating, analysing and interpreting public opinion, attitudes, future trends and issues which might be relevant to any section of the organisation;
- ii. counselling management in all the departments within the organisation; and
- iii. establishing and maintaining a two-way communication between the organisation and its various publics in order to win cooperation.

Looking at all the definitions and analysis above, four basic elements can be identified. These are:

- i. public relations is a social management philosophy;

- ii. it is an expression of this philosophy in policy decisions;
- iii. it is action resulting from these policies; and
- iv. it is a two-way communication, which contributes toward the creation of these policies and then explains, reveals, rationalises or promotes them to the publics, so as to secure mutual understanding and good will (Achison, *ibid*).

### Origin of Public Relations

The practice of public relations is as old as history. Even as early as 1800 BC, public relations in one form or the other was practised. Its origin can be traced to the biblical injunction in Leviticus 19:18 that: 'Thou shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shall love thy neighbor as thy self. I am the Lord.' From the above, it can be seen that it is good to be good, and public relations is all about being good. An organisation that is good to its immediate neighbours (community) will contribute to its well-being and will get their understanding.

According to Okon (1998:98), public relations is age- long. The first practice of public relations was by Adam and Eve when they were still in the Garden of Eden.

After they had disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit, they realised that they were naked, when God called them, they first thought of covering their nudity before appearing before God. This is public relations because they wanted to appear presentable before God. In the same vein, all organisations want to appear presentable before their publics.

Ibrahim (2003) has said that in those days, kings, lords, chiefs and so on took part in one form of public relations activity or the other. The social functions and activities they performed include exchange of gifts, valuable materials such as gold, clothes, and even human beings; like giving girls out for marriage as a token of good relationship and friendship. Public relations has always been with us and has been carried out in one way or the other. In those days,

priests used to be the spokesmen of the gods and the kings in traditional settings just as we have public relations practitioners speaking for the organisations or individuals they represented in our contemporary lives.

Baran (2002: 310) has divided the history of public relations into four stages, which are; the early public relations, propaganda stage, early two-way communication and advanced two-way communication. Right from 1800BC archaeologists in Iraq have found out what could be called a public information bulletin. This was in a tablet form that provided farmers with information on sowing, irrigating, and harvesting of their crops. Also from the Roman empire, Caesar bombarded his people constantly with reports of his achievements to 'maintain morale and to solidify his reputation and position of power.'

The campaign of public relations was on, in colonial America and contributed a lot to creating the colonies. Genghis Khan, for instance, would send 'advance men' to tell stories of his might hoping to frighten his enemies into surrendering (Baran, *ibid.*). Between 1787 and 1789 John Jay, James Madison and Alex Hamilton published *The Federalist Papers* which were originally a series of 85 letters designed to sway public opinion in the early independent United States towards support and passage of a new constitution, an early effort on issues of management. American statesman, George Washington had the foresight in 1800 to hire Mason Weems to promote his image and reputation.

The aforementioned facts show that long ago, people and organisations have been using planned communication to influence public opinion for the promotion of their image.

The next stage, which is that of propaganda/publicity, started with the mass circulation of newspapers and magazines in the 1830s, which increased the ability of people and organisations to communicate with the public. Andrew Jackson, former US president in 1833 employed the services of Amos Kendall, a former newspaperman and he became the country's first presidential press secretary. Public relations during this period began to have negative connotations when politicians saw the growth of the press as a new way of campaigning.



William Jennings Bryan and William McKinsley, both presidential aspirants in 1896, established their headquarters in Chicago where they issued press releases, position papers, bills and pamphlets.

Publicity Bureau, the first formal publicity company was started in Boston in 1906. It later had offices in New York, Chicago, Washington, St Louis and Topeka to assist the railroad industry to challenge federal regulations that are not in its favour. At the time when the rail road workers had problems of accidents and strikes, which was characterised by suppression of information, Ivy Lee, a reporter with *New York World* was consulted and he took reporters to the scene, established a press centre, distributed news releases and assisted newsmen in getting additional information and photographs they needed to write their stories (Igben, 1997). This period could be said to be the beginning of organised public relations, but information was linear and the flow was just from the organisation to the public through the press.

The stage that followed was that of the early two-way communication flow. It was the era that witnessed the beginning of the First World War, when Woodrow Wilson recognising that the public was not interested in the war and tried to devise a means to motivate them. He assigned a former newspaperman, George Creed to head a committee on public information in 1917 (Baran, *ibid.*). The responsibility of the committee was to educate the people about the war and win their support. Public relations developed further with the formation of the National Association of Accredited Publicity Directors in 1933. The American Council of Public Relations was established in 1936, three years later. The merger of the two bodies in 1947 gave birth to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) (Daramola, 2003).

This stage, according to (Baran, *ibid.*) was followed by that of the advanced two-way communication. This was the post World War II period when it became appropriate for organisations in the United States to know what their publics thought about them. It was the period of more organised public relations when feedback became an important component in the practice of public relations. Some well known names

came into the business during the period. One of such practitioners was Anne Williams Wheaton who was Associate Press Secretary to President Eisenhower. There were also great public relations firms like Whitaker and Baxter companies with Leone Baxter as president. Some of the factors that helped to develop public relations further are advancement in technology, growth of the middle class, growth of organisations, better research tools, and professionalism, consumerism, development of communication media, population growth, the communication gap, recognition of social responsibility and so on.

### Growth in Nigeria

The need for public relations practice in Nigeria according to Osuji (1990:6) arose immediately after the Second World War when there was need for effective public information as a result of the growing unpopularity of the then colonial government. A lot of people did not understand the rationale for the war and there was need to educate them and let them know why Nigerians should be recruited to help in the prosecution of the war. Daramola (2003) is, however, of the view that the emergence of public relations in Nigeria can be traced to Nigeria's participation in the empire day exhibition in 1924 under C. J. Lawrence. This, eventually, led to the formation of the first information office in Lagos, which was responsible for disseminating war information. This was later changed to the public relations office in 1944. It was primarily saddled with the responsibility and functions of creating a favourable image for the country.

Adebola (1992) cited in Ajala (1993) said that the public relations office was primarily set up to publicise the colonial war and to encourage the youths to join the war. In 1947, the office was again changed to public relations department under D. C. Fletcher after the adoption of the Richard's Constitution.

The practice of public relations was not popular in Nigeria during this period because very few Nigerians had knowledge about what public relations practice was all about. With the growth of economic, social and political programmes in the country, the knowledge and

growth of public relations as a career increased but, the absence of any programme for understanding public relations practice has prevented many Nigerian organisations including government establishments and parastatals from benefiting from the programmes of public relations until recently. When it started, it was part of good skill; not actually public relations, while some people understood it as propaganda.

The colonial masters who first practised public relations in Nigeria established it in the Ministry of Information and its main functions were to disseminate war information as well as other government information to the public. By 1963, according to Benson-Eluwa (1999:4) through the help of other practitioners, Sam Epelle, one of the foremost public relations practitioners in Nigeria formed the then Public Relations Association of Nigeria (PRAN) which started to enlighten the public on the current and practical applications of public relations. Since this was the only place that public relations knowledge could then be formally acquired, some Nigerians started to travel abroad to study the subject. When some of these people returned, the number of practitioners increased and the functions and objectives were widened.

The development of public relations practice in Nigeria can be divided into two distinctive periods. These are:

- a. the pre-independence era characterised by the colonial governments; and
- b. the post-independence era that saw the emergence of civilian and military governments, each with its peculiarities and demands.

The fact is that until the Second World War, the colonial government did not have any social, economic and political programme: to 'sell' to the people, and as a result, public relations practice was not accorded any institutional recognition or regarded as a veritable outfit of government. The colonial government then liaised with the traditional rulers who acted as agents of the government and performed some public relations activities for the government during the period.

After the establishment of the public relations department under Mr D.C. Fletcher, earlier mentioned, the period witnessed editors and reporters for the first time having an official source of information. The department functioned effectively as the local press relations unit of the government provided much needed rapport between government and the local press.

As the country developed, certain social functions grew in prominence, and such growth in government functions led to the recognition given to public relations practice by the government between 1960 and 1966 in the then Ministry of Information under Chief T.O.S. Benson which led to the birth of the Federal Ministry of Information (a structured information organ) out of what used to be the British War Information Office. Following this development, government public relations duty in Nigeria was performed by the Ministry of Information at the Federal level since it is the only recognised institution set up to perform public relations functions for the government. The main functions of the department were:

- i. keeping the Nigerian public well informed about government activities, programmes, policies, plans and securing understanding and cooperation in furthering government goals; and
- ii. keeping government informed about the views of the public on government policies and new measures.

Dr Sam Epelle, a one-time Director of Information in Nigeria as earlier mentioned, was compelled to intervene sometime around 1961 by initiating the formation of a body that would professionally think, plan, practice and promote public relations practice in Nigeria. By 1963, with the help of other colleagues, the Public Relations Association of Nigeria (PRAN) was formed. Dr Epelle became the coordinator, later the chairman and eventually, the president in Lagos and his colleagues established branches in Enugu and Port Harcourt. As the number of practitioners increased, their objectives and functions became widened. The Public Relations Association of Nigeria (PRAN) later developed into the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) in 1972.

The development of public relations practice in the private sector in Nigeria started in the country with the United African Company (UAC) establishing a public relations department in 1949. The basic objective of the department was to inform business and commerce about a major Nigeria industry, technical and commercial company involved in the stability of the economy, life and progress of Nigeria. It must be noted that most of the prominent public relations practitioners in Nigeria started their career while working for UAC. According to Ajala (ibid), while some Nigeria companies practitioners fought for the recognition of the need for public relations practice, UAC deliberately ensured the training of qualified Nigerians who were absorbed into management positions.

Another organisation in the private sector that promoted and has been committed to the growth of public relations practice in Nigeria apart from UAC is Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC). The company has given public relations as a profession its rightful place and has done a lot to encourage and promote its practice.

After independence in 1960, the indigenous government tried to encourage the practice of public relations. According to Nigeria Institution of Public Relations (NIPR) anniversary publication of 1988, government took advantage of the information ministry and utilised effectively the machinery at the federal level to build its image. Since the political structure allowed autonomous control of information channels at the state level, the party in power effectively utilised the machinery to promote its image and during the Shagari regime (1979 to 1983), the Ministry of Information became part of the office of the President. Even with the advent of the military in 1983, the Federal Government believed in the power of public relations in the art of governance. The armed forces and police have always had and maintained public relations offices in all their formations. The fact that they maintained public relations in the politics of the public sector goes a long way to emphasise the importance of public relations as a profession and the recognition it has gained in Nigeria.

It must, however, be noted that June 1, 1990 was a memorable day for public relations practice in Nigeria because it was the day, that the then military president of Nigeria, General Ibrahim Babangida signed

Decree No 16 Nigerian Institute of Public Relations Practitioners decree of 1990 into law. This puts Nigeria among the very few countries in the world that have the profession recognised by law. Although the implementation of the law has been very difficult because of logistic problems, it must, however, be emphasised that it is illegal for anybody that is not a member of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations to practice the profession in Nigeria. NIPR provides membership categories for fellows, members and associates. There are also students and corporate members. There is a professional examination conducted by the NIPR for unqualified people who want to become members of the Institute. In 1972, the KELAD School of Public Relations was established in Lagos and in September 1992, the NIPR inaugurated the first Masters of Science (M.Sc) programme in Public Relations at the University of Nigeria Nsukka (Enugu Campus). The school has gone further to start a doctorate programme (PhD) in Public Relations.

In Nigeria, like every other professions, the practice of public relations is guided and regulated by the law establishing the profession. Below is a summary of the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations Practitioners Decree No.16 of 1990 reproduced from *Public Relations and the Law* Professional Practice Guideline paper No.1 published by NIPR.

### **Summary of Nigerian Institute of Public Relations Practitioners Decree No. 16 of 1990**

The Nigerian Institute of Public Relations Practitioners Decree, No. 16 of 1990 was promulgated to give legal teeth to the practice of Public Relations in Nigeria. It was also intended to sensitise the profession and its practitioners by creating a Register of Public Relations Practitioners in Nigeria, and prescribing entry qualifications before one can be registered. It further went on to establish a body known as The Public Relations Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal with the sole responsibility of maintaining discipline in the profession.

#### **The Decree**

The degree is divided into six parts with a schedule annexed thereto.

## Part 1

This contains five sections. Section 1, sub section 1 established the body to be known as the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations (NIPR) to be referred to as The Institute; a body corporate. In paragraph A of the sub section, the body was given power to determine the standards of knowledge and skill to be attained by persons seeking to become members of the Institute.

In paragraph B, power was conferred on the Institute to secure the establishment and maintenance of a register of fellows, members and associates of the profession and the publication of the list of those persons. Paragraph C states that functions of the Institute shall be performed by Council established under Section 4. These functions include the administration and general management of the Institute.

Sub Section 2 and 3 give the Institute 'The Legal Personality' with all attributes such as the right to sue and be sued in its corporate name, the right to acquire, to dispose of any moveable and immoveable property and to have perpetual succession and common seal.

**Section 2 Sub Section 1** categorises Membership of the institute into three *viz*:

- i. Fellows;
- ii. Members; and
- iii. Associates.

Each of them is to be registered as Public Relations Practitioners and shall have the status as registered in the Institute accordingly.

**Sub-Section 2** stipulates that persons so registered shall be entitled to be enrolled as:

- i. *Fellows*: if the Council is satisfied that for the period of ten years immediately preceding the date of their application they have been fit and proper persons, in addition to being holders of approved academic qualifications. They must have been in active practice of the profession either on their own or in partnership with other members of the profession.

- ii. Members:* where for the period of not less than ten years immediately preceding the date of their application, they have been enrolled as associates, whether in active practice or not.
- iii. Associates:* after passing examinations prescribed or approved by the Institute and satisfy the Council that they are fit and proper persons.

**Sub-Section 3** stipulates that persons enrolled by the Institute shall be holders of qualifications acceptable to the Institute and which shall not be less than that prescribed in schedule 4, while sub section 4 gives the persons so enrolled power to use such letters after their names and be entitled to receive a certificate in such form (fellow, member and associate) for that purpose. Sub Section five also provides for the enrollment of graduates, officiates and students for the purpose of being registered practitioners.

The President and Vice-President shall each hold office for a term of two years and shall be Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council of the Institute respectively and in case of incapacity or inability for any reason of the President, the Vice-President shall act as President for the unexpired portion of his term of office. Also where any of them ceases to be a member of the Institute, he shall also cease to hold the office.

**Section 4** established a body known as the 'council' whose main function shall be the administration and general management of the Institute. The council shall consist of the President and the Vice-President respectively and a total of twenty other persons being fellows, members or associate members of the Institute. Of these, five shall be appointed, fifteen elected by the Institute, eight of whom must be in active practice of the profession.

**Section 5** gives the Council powers to do all things that will be for the good purpose of carrying out the activities of the institute.



## Part 2

This part has two sections — Sections 6 and 7 which in the main deals with the funds of the Institute, which shall be managed by the Council and audited each financial year.

The account when audited shall be submitted to the Institute for approval. Also, power was given to the Council to invest in any security created or issued by, on behalf of the Federal Government or in such other securities in Nigeria approved by the Council, and also to borrow money for the purpose of developing the Institute.

## Part 3

This contains Sections 8 and 9, it established the Office of the Registrar and the Register. The Register shall contain the names, addresses, approved qualifications and particulars, as may be specified in the rules of all persons entitled to be enrolled as Fellows, Members or Associates as the case may be. The Registrar, which shall be appointed by the Council, shall be saddled with the responsibility of administering the Register of members, assisted by other persons to be appointed also by the Council. The Registrar shall also print or publish the Register to be put on sale to members of the public, not later than two years after the commencement of the decree and in subsequent years to put on sale any corrected edition and/or corrections of such Register. He is also to deposit a copy of each edition and/or corrections of such Register at the principal office of the Institute.

## Part 4

This part deals with the registration of members. Before a person can be registered as a Public Relations practitioner in Nigeria, he must possess any of the qualifications as stipulated in Section 10 of the Decree. Section 10, Sub-Section 1 Paragraphs A, B and C provide that he passes the qualifying examination accepted by the Institute under this decree and completes the practical training prescribed by the Council from time to

time or he holds a qualification granted outside Nigeria but recognised by the Institute, or any of the qualifications as prescribed in Schedule 4 and has complied with other requirements under Section 8 Sub-Section 4. Sub-Section 2 provides that a person could still be registered, if he satisfies the Council that immediately before the commencement of this decree, he had not less than five years experience as a Public Relations Executive of a company registered under the Companies Act of 1968, now replaced by the Companies Act of 1990. Sub-Section 3 stipulates that any applicant for registration shall in addition satisfy the Council that he is of good character, has attained the age of 21 and has not been convicted in Nigeria or elsewhere of fraud, dishonesty or any offence incompatible with the status of a Public Relations practitioner.

Section II, Sub-Section 1, Paragraphs A and B empower the Council to approve any course of training and standard of knowledge at any Institution that is intended for persons seeking to become members of the profession, in so far as it confers on such persons sufficient skills and knowledge for admission to the Institute. Sub-Section 2 gives the Council powers to withdraw any approval so given, if proper notice and fair hearing had been given to such persons.

Section 12 gives the Council supervisory powers over the examinations leading to the approval qualifications.

## **Part 5**

Section 13 established the Public Relations Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal, otherwise known as 'The Disciplinary Tribunal' which is charged with the responsibility of maintaining discipline in the institute. The Tribunal shall have a Chairman and six other members appointed by the Institute.

The Chairman of the Tribunal shall be the Chairman of the Council. Sub-Section 3 established an investigation panel which shall conduct preliminary investigation into allegations against members accused of improper conduct in any professional respect and make recommendations to the Disciplinary Tribunal. Members of the panel shall consist of five members, four of whom shall be members of the Council. The fifth would be a Council member but a Public Relations practitioner.

Section 14 stipulates the Disciplinary Tribunal measures that can be taken against a person who in the opinion of the Tribunal is guilty of infamous conduct in a professional respect or has been convicted of an offence which in the opinion of the Tribunal is incompatible with his status as a Public Relations practitioner or one whose name has been fraudulently enrolled or registered. These disciplinary measures may come in form of a reprimand or in the form of having the name of the offender struck off the rolls or register, depending on the gravity of the offence.

## Part 6

This part deals with the general conduct of the Institute and with the interpretation of words and phrases. Section 15 deals with procedures on how a person who is not a member of the Institute but because of the operation of this decree could apply to become a member.

Section 16 in Paragraphs A, B and C stipulate conditions under which a person can be deemed fit to practise as a Public Relations Practitioner. It includes where he engages himself in practice of Public Relations or holds himself out to the public as a Public Relations practitioner, or renders professional service or assistance in, or about matters of Public Relations or where he renders any other service, which may by regulations made by the Council. These are after consideration of remuneration received or to be received and whether by himself or in partnership with any other person.

While Section 17 deals with rules as to practice and procedure, Section 18 is to the effect that the Institute shall provide and maintain a library and encourage research into Public Relations and allied subjects.

Section 19, 20, 21 deal with offences and penalties, regulations and rules, dissolution of the Association and the transfer of certain properties of the Association. While Section 22 deals with the interpretation of words.

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