

TALKING WITHOUT WORDS (TAKING THE NEXT STEP)

The e-mails sent by the members of the Edo Community (EC) have shown originality, were stimulating, serious and sometimes quite amusing. The endeavour so far shows the commitment of all to a better Edo Land but discourse at the level of this forum cannot and will not change things on the ground. Changing things for the better for our people on the ground is obviously the primary objective of all members of this forum. It is for this reason it is important to talk without words and take the next step for the good of our people.

Edo Community on the web.

These are young and middle aged men and women of Edo state origin, drawn randomly amongst the Edo's in Diaspora principally resident in Europe and America with a common objective.

They are all intellectuals in their various callings keen to make Edo state a better place. The group is very rich in human resources and have the capacity to effect a change in Edo Land if their activities are properly harnessed and directed.

The medium for expression is the internet.

How Effective Is The Group.

The effectiveness of the group can be gauged presently by the capacity of the audience.

The population of Edo state is a few million and less than 1% have access to telephones in their homes. Of these small percentage, less than 10% have access to the internet.

NITEL has about 400,000 lines for 120 million Nigerians.

It is therefore clear that the discourse on the web is for the consumption of a select few, the middle working class using the British definition of social classification; as they only have access to the internet and therefore the strong activity of the EC on the forum.

To prove my point, I requested a random sampling of 50 undergraduates from each university, Uniben and Edo State University, drawn across all the faculties and departments. The results was 7(14%) from Uniben and 4(8%) of the students knew of the existence of the Edo community forum on the Web. Non of these people who answered yes to the questions regularly read the postings therein nor do they have regular access to the internet. They are the leaders of tomorrow and the audience we need to target.

The Next Step.

To become effective on the ground, we need to take the next step which is to get the information to the grassroots.

We can support PC and internet access in the two University Union

Buildings so that postings on the web can be read, downloaded and distributed.

For the teeming population without access to PC and internet outlet, we could organise seminars, social and cultural events, and lectures on topical issues to educate the people, after all knowledge is power.

An EC column in the local newspaper can print selected postings from the community members, ensuring our contributions to debates on topical issues in Edo State and affecting decisions and outcomes in the legislative assembly and the functioning of the executive cabinet of the state.

Using the forum, attention can be drawn to the poor economic state of Edo land, and the dismal state of our health and educational institutions.

It is known our hospitals are death traps with the highest maternal mortality in the world. By speaking without words we can change the high mortality rate by providing monitoring equipments for women in labour, seminars for the medical staff, endoscopic equipment for diagnostic use. In other areas which are lacking we can provide portable dialysis machines for the renal units, echocardiography machines for the cardiology units and provision of various scanning machines for the radiology units.

Other examples include providing copies of the United Nation videos on the atrocities and effect of trafficking in women , videos on sexually transmissible diseases and HIV to all secondary schools in the state. The seminars can also draw attention to the poor state of the educational institutions in Edo land, for example, laboratories without reagents and classrooms without desks and chairs.

In the developed world, non governmental and charitable organisations complement the efforts of the government. Even in the UK charitable organisations fund research and treatment programmes, provide food for the hungry and homes for the homeless. The resources of any government is not infinite.

E-mail postings from our rooms in our cosy homes in Europe and America, are the first step although they cannot change things on the ground. Our actions must be constructive, informing, educating and not seeking to discredit or to be divisive.

Mr Aire lyare has shown how to be a constructive critic, by providing evidence for all his arguments. On such a path we should tread, and tread boldly.

Members of the forum must bear in mind that the people of Edo state cannot demand, for what to them, does not exist. How can a patient

know his treatment is suboptimal if he lacks knowledge to know what to expect, or the students know his or her education is inadequate if he or she is not aware of the set standard?

The forum should in addition to reminding and informing ourselves, educate the people of Edo state on what they lack in all spheres of life so that they can in turn demand for it. Without educating the people, the activity of the EC on the web could amount to making 'noise in the forest' where no one hears it.

I therefore believe we should make our presence felt first by educating the masses.

We can achieve this if we put our heads together to decide on the best option to take or the best direction to head for.

Thank you.

Information

Since the release of the above article cellular/mobile phone technology have been introduced into Benin City with over 1,000,000 lines. In addition there are now numerous internet cafes dotted around the city. The original problem of internet access no longer exists, for those who can afford it.

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