



Public Relations Strategies, Outcomes and Challenges in Development Intervention in Nigeria: An Empirical Literature Review

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Abstract

Empirical studies on the application of public relations strategies in Nigerian development interventions remain fragmented across sectors and intervention contexts, making it difficult to establish broader patterns regarding the strategies employed, their outcomes and the challenges affecting their application. This study therefore reviewed empirical evidence on PR strategies applied in diverse development interventions in Nigeria. A qualitative empirical literature review design was adopted. Relevant studies published between 2023 and 2026 were identified through Google Scholar, digital academic databases, institutional and university repositories, and Nigerian journal platforms. Thirteen studies met the inclusion criteria and were analysed using deductive thematic analysis based on three predetermined dimensions: PR strategies, outcomes and challenges. The findings indicate that Nigerian development interventions employ a combination of PR strategies: stakeholder engagement, community relations, media relations, interpersonal communication and digital platforms. Reported outcomes include awareness, trust, transparency, stakeholder relationships, participation, collaboration, mobilisation and institutional reputation. However, inadequate resources, weak feedback mechanisms, misinformation, limited local-language communication, poor infrastructure and reactive stakeholder engagement constrain effective implementation. The review further shows that existing studies provide stronger evidence of communicative and relational outcomes than of direct causal relationships between PR activities and broader development outcomes.

Keywords: public relations; development interventions; PR strategies; public relations outcomes; communication challenges; Nigeria

Introduction

Public relations (PR) has become an increasingly important component of development interventions globally because the success of policies, programmes and projects depends not only on the resources invested in them but also on how effectively implementing organisations communicate, engage and build relationships with the stakeholders they seek to serve (Amevor, 2025; Bassey & Etika, 2019). International development organisations have incorporated public relations and related strategic communication practices into development interventions to facilitate stakeholder engagement, participation, cooperation and public support. This is evident in USAID-



sponsored development programming in Bolivia (Paquette et al., 2015), UNICEF-supported humanitarian intervention in Nigeria (Madu et al., 2025), and vaccine development and introduction involving WHO and UNICEF (Berlier et al., 2015).

Similarly, in Nigeria, government agencies such as the EFCC and NDLEA, tertiary educational institutions such as universities, non-governmental organisations and development partners increasingly employ diverse public relations strategies to implement and promote programmes across different sectors (Ogunwemimo & Obayi, 2025; Ajayi-Ayodele & Ikuesewo-Akinbami, 2025). This development has generated growing empirical interest in how PR strategies are applied across diverse sectors, including agricultural development, health, education, revenue generation, rural development, conflict management and social protection. In agricultural development, Garba et al. (2024) identified media relations and partnerships with agricultural organisations as prominent strategies, while Chiakaan et al. (2023) reported information sharing, sensitisation campaigns and medical outreach in government hospitals. In education, Salihu and Santas (2025) found that press statements, press conferences, media relations and stakeholder engagement were prominent in the management of TETFund intervention programmes, while Ubandoma and Ugondo (2024) examined the application of PR tools for revenue generation by the Taraba State Board of Internal Revenue. Similarly, Ugboodu et al. (2025) identified two-way communication and community development projects as prominent community-relations strategies for rural development. Saidu and Santas (2024) examined PR strategies for managing farmer-herder conflict in Benue State, while Akinsola and Santas (2024) found social media campaigns, particularly Facebook, to be prominent in the implementation of the N-Power social intervention programme.

The above studies indicate that PR strategies are applied across diverse public-sector and development contexts, with reported outcomes including awareness, trust, participation, mobilisation, collaboration, reputation and conflict management. However, their findings remain dispersed across sectors, intervention types and institutional contexts. This fragmentation makes it difficult to develop a coherent understanding of which PR strategies are associated with particular outcomes, the conditions under which they appear to be effective, and the limitations that may constrain their application. Therefore, a systematic synthesis of these studies is necessary to identify recurring patterns, differences and gaps in the application and outcomes of these strategies. This study addresses this gap through a qualitative empirical literature review of Nigerian studies on public relations in development interventions. It synthesises evidence from empirical studies conducted across different intervention contexts and organises the findings thematically around three dimensions: PR strategies, PR outcomes and PR challenges. The study specifically provides answers to the following research questions:

1. What public relations strategies are reported in empirical studies of development interventions in Nigeria?



2. What outcomes are associated with the use of public relations strategies in development interventions in Nigeria?
3. What challenges affect the application of public relations strategies in development interventions in Nigeria?

Public Relations Strategies: An overview

In public relations (PR), strategy provides a framework for planning and implementing communication activities that support organisational goals, generate publicity, build favourable identities and maintain relationships with publics (Grunig & Grunig, 2009). PR strategies can therefore be understood as planned and integrated activities through which organisations align communication with broader organisational objectives and operations (Cutlip et al., 2006). They involve the deliberate allocation and coordination of organisational resources in response to internal capabilities, limitations and changes in the external environment (Mintzberg & Quinn, 1991, as cited in Cutlip et al., 2006). PR strategy enables organisations to move from their present position towards desired outcomes through coordinated communication activities such as media relations, content creation, stakeholder engagement and digital communication (Zerfass & Volk, 2020).

Conceptualising Development Interventions

Development interventions can be understood as deliberate and organised efforts to address identified development problems or needs and influence desired changes in particular populations, institutions or systems (Elwert & Bierschenk, 1988). The OECD (2021), for example, treats interventions broadly as policies, strategies, programmes, projects, technical assistance, policy advice, financing mechanisms and other organised activities, while recognising that they may be implemented by or involve governments, civil society organisations, private entities and international bodies. Thus, interventions may include an agricultural productivity programme, a public health vaccination initiative, an education-support scheme, a rural infrastructure project, a social-protection programme or a peacebuilding initiative.

Development interventions are commonly associated with government agencies, development partners and donors, international organisations, NGOs and civil society organisations, private-sector actors, and community or local institutions, which may fund, design, implement or oversee interventions; importantly, beneficiaries may be individuals, groups or organisations that benefit directly or indirectly (OECD, 2021). Examples of development interventions in Nigeria include the World Bank-supported Livestock Productivity and Resilience Support (L-PRES), UNICEF-supported health, nutrition and WASH programmes, N-Power under the National Social Investment Programme, and UNDP peacebuilding and stabilisation programmes, among others. Every intervention is designed to achieve a particular goal, which can be aligned with global targets within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), national or regional goals, or address a particular immediate need, such as a disease outbreak or clashes between two or more groups.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative empirical literature review design to synthesise evidence on public relations strategies, outcomes and challenges associated with development interventions



in Nigeria. Relevant empirical studies were identified through Google Scholar and a range of digital academic databases, institutional repositories, university repositories and Nigerian journal platforms. These sources were deliberately used because Nigerian studies, particularly those published in local journals, university publications and institutional repositories, are not always comprehensively indexed in major international databases. Searching these sources therefore improved the likelihood of identifying context-specific empirical evidence relevant to Nigeria.

The search used combinations of keywords including public relations, PR strategies, development interventions, development communication, stakeholder engagement, community mobilisation, agricultural development, rural development, development programmes, outcomes and challenges. Only empirical studies conducted in Nigeria within 2023 to 2026 and reporting primary evidence on public relations or closely related strategic communication practices in development interventions were included. Conceptual papers, literature reviews, opinion articles, studies based solely on secondary data, and studies conducted outside Nigeria were excluded. The selected studies were thematically analysed and synthesised under three themes: public relations strategies, outcomes, and challenges.

Table 1. *The Corpus*

S/N	Author(s)	Year	Method	Key findings
1	Salihu & Santas	2025	Descriptive cross-sectional survey; 353 respondents	Press statements, press conferences, media relations and stakeholder engagement were the major PR strategies. Stakeholder engagement fostered trust, transparency and loyalty, while PR contributed to institutional reputation and goodwill.
2	Emejor	2024	Survey and in-depth interviews	Communication strategies were effective in mitigating farmer–herder conflict. However, inadequate funding and limited use of local languages constrained implementation. The study recommended local-language communication and stronger community-oriented media channels.
3	Ahmed et al.	2024	Descriptive survey; questionnaire	Meetings, media relations, community relations, sponsorships, training, counselling, workshops, newsletters, advertorials and social media were used as PR strategies. However, the implementation of PR strategies was relatively limited, reducing their contribution to inclusive education initiatives.
4	Garba, Shekobago & Muhammad	2024	Cross-sectional survey; 388 respondents	Media relations, partnerships with agricultural organisations, community engagement and social media were prominent strategies. Most respondents perceived PR as effective in promoting agricultural development, but the study recommended continuous evaluation and targeted outreach.



5	Ugbodu et al.	2025	Survey; 410 respondents	Two-way communication and sponsorship of community development projects were prominent community-relations strategies. They enhanced trust, collaboration and mutual understanding between organisations and host communities.
6	Kente & Oyinoi	2023	Survey research involving selected NPOs	Community, media, employee/volunteer, donor/sponsor and government relations were widely used. Press releases, newsletters, conferences, brochures, reports, internet communication and multimedia tools supported awareness, mobilisation, fundraising, crisis management and reputation building.
7	Akinsola & Santas	2024	Quantitative survey; 358 N-Power beneficiaries	Social media campaigns, particularly Facebook, were prominent in communicating with beneficiaries. Digital PR enhanced information dissemination and engagement, but misinformation and inconsistent feedback mechanisms remained challenges.
9	Omachi, Asemah & Ekharefo	2024	Qualitative study; in-depth interviews with 20 stakeholders	Proactive community engagement, transparency and digital communication strengthened public trust and citizen–government relations. Reactive communication was associated with weaker stakeholder engagement.
10	Saidu & Santas	2024	Mixed methods; questionnaire and interviews; 600 respondents	Government relied heavily on mass and social media, publicity and propaganda. However, community mobilisation, negotiation and consultation were underused. Challenges included inadequate PR personnel, reactive communication, poor information dissemination and limited stakeholder consultation.
11	Unigwe & Okika	2025	Mixed-methods study	Dialogue, information management, stakeholder engagement and media outreach contributed to conflict management, trust and cooperation. Government inaction, misinformation and inadequate rural communication infrastructure constrained PR effectiveness.
12	Yeibo & Onyekosor	2024	Survey; questionnaire administered to 30 agricultural science students	Word-of-mouth communication through opinion leaders was identified as particularly relevant to farmer mobilisation, and PR strategies were generally perceived as useful for agricultural development. However, the use of students rather than actual farmers limits the strength of its conclusions for rural agricultural populations.
13	Ada	2025	Descriptive survey; questionnaire	Swift response, consistent information dissemination and proactive engagement helped manage organisational crises and preserve goodwill. Although the study is corporate



				rather than development-focused, it provides evidence on the relationship-management function of PR.
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The table above indicates that a total of thirteen relevant articles were retrieved and included in the analysis.

Result

The study employed deductive thematic analysis because the review was guided by three predefined analytical dimensions derived from the study objectives and research questions: public relations strategies, PR outcomes, and PR challenges in development interventions. This approach enabled the researcher to systematically organise findings from the selected Nigerian empirical studies according to concepts established before the analysis, while also facilitating comparison across the studies. The approach was considered appropriate because the purpose of the review was not to generate entirely new themes inductively, but to synthesise existing empirical evidence in relation to specific dimensions of public relations in development interventions.

Theme 1. Public Relations Strategies in Development Interventions

The literature suggests that the public relations strategies predominantly adopted in development interventions in Nigeria are a combination of stakeholder engagement, community relations, media relations, interpersonal communication and digital platforms. Salihu and Santas (2025), for example, identified press statements, press conferences, media relations and stakeholder engagement as major strategies in TETFund intervention programmes, with stakeholder engagement particularly associated with trust, transparency and loyalty. Similarly, Garba, Shekobago and Muhammad (2024) found that media relations, partnerships with agricultural organisations, community engagement and social media were prominent in agricultural development communication. These findings suggest a movement from predominantly media-centred publicity towards more relational approaches in which development organisations seek to establish and maintain relationships with stakeholders.

The importance of direct and community-based communication is further demonstrated by Ugboodu et al. (2025), who found that two-way communication and sponsorship of community development projects strengthened relationships between organisations and host communities. Emejor (2024), working within the National Livestock Transformation Plan, similarly showed the importance of communication in addressing farmer–herder tensions, although the study highlighted the need for local-language communication and stronger community-oriented media channels. Yeibo and Onyekosor (2024) also identified word-of-mouth communication through opinion leaders as particularly relevant to farmer mobilisation. However, the latter finding should be interpreted cautiously because the study relied on agricultural science students rather than actual farmers.

Other studies demonstrate the growing role of digital communication. Akinsola and Santas (2024) found that social media campaigns, particularly Facebook, were prominent in communicating with N-Power beneficiaries, while Omachi, et al., (2024) reported that digital communication, alongside proactive community engagement and transparency, strengthened



citizen–government relations. Kente and Oyinoyi (2023) provide a broader picture, identifying community, media, donor, government and volunteer relations, supported by press releases, newsletters, brochures, reports, internet communication and multimedia tools. These studies therefore suggest that effective development PR is multi-channel and stakeholder-oriented, combining conventional media, interpersonal communication, community engagement and digital platforms. Nevertheless, the literature provides less evidence on how these different strategies are deliberately integrated within a single development intervention, particularly in rural livestock communities where cultural practices, language, geographical accessibility and traditional authority structures may influence communication effectiveness.

Theme 2. Outcomes of Public Relations in Development Interventions

The review further indicates PR applications within development intervention programmes, with outcomes that include awareness, trust, transparency, stakeholder relationships, participation, collaboration, mobilisation and institutional reputation. Salihu and Santas (2025) found that stakeholder engagement within TETFund interventions promoted trust, transparency and loyalty, while PR contributed to institutional reputation and goodwill. Similarly, Ugboodu et al. (2025) reported that two-way communication and community-development initiatives enhanced trust, collaboration and mutual understanding. These findings imply that PR can perform a relational function in development interventions by creating conditions for constructive relationships between implementing organisations and their publics.

Studies from agricultural and conflict-related interventions further suggest that communication outcomes can influence participation and cooperation. Garba, Shekobago and Muhammad (2024) reported that PR was perceived as effective in promoting agricultural development, particularly through media relations, partnerships and community engagement. Emejor (2024) found that strategic communication contributed to addressing farmer–herder tensions by promoting understanding, although its effectiveness was constrained by inadequate funding and limited local-language communication. Unigwe and Okika (2025) similarly found that dialogue, information management, stakeholder engagement and media outreach contributed to trust, cooperation and conflict management. Collectively, these outcomes suggest that the value of PR in development intervention programme implementation lies partly in its capacity to facilitate understanding, relationship-building and stakeholder cooperation, which are important conditions for programme acceptance and participation.

Additionally, digital communication also appears to contribute to beneficiary engagement. Akinsola and Santas (2024) found that social media enhanced information dissemination and engagement among N-Power beneficiaries, while Omachi, et al., (2024) linked proactive engagement, transparency and digital communication with stronger public trust and citizen–government relationships. However, the evidence also indicates that communication does not automatically produce positive outcomes. Ahmed et al. (2024) found that the relatively limited implementation of PR strategies reduced their contribution to inclusive education initiatives, while



Saidu and Santas (2024) reported that the underuse of community mobilisation, negotiation and consultation limited the effectiveness of government communication in farmer–herder conflict management. Thus, the literature suggests that PR effectiveness depends not merely on the presence of PR activities but on their quality, consistency, responsiveness and degree of stakeholder involvement. However, it is important to note a limitation across the literature whereby many studies report perceived or associated outcomes rather than demonstrating direct causal relationships between PR activities and broader development outcomes.

Theme 3. Challenges of Public Relations in Development Interventions

The literature identifies several interconnected constraints that limit the effectiveness of PR in Nigerian development interventions. Specifically, resource limitations are prominent, as many studies, such as Emejor (2024), identified inadequate funding as a constraint on communication for the National Livestock Transformation Plan, while Ahmed et al. (2024) reported limited implementation of PR strategies in inclusive education. These findings suggest that the existence of a PR strategic framework within any development programme or intervention does not necessarily translate into effective implementation where financial and organisational resources are insufficient.

Another major challenge concerns the quality and direction of stakeholder communication. Saidu and Santas (2024) found that government communication in farmer–herder conflict relied heavily on mass media, social media, publicity and propaganda, while community mobilisation, negotiation and consultation were comparatively underused. The study also identified inadequate PR personnel, poor information dissemination and reactive communication as important constraints. Similarly, Omachi et al. (2024) found a contrast between proactive community engagement, transparency and digital communication in Lokoja and the weaker stakeholder engagement associated with a more reactive approach in Ankpa. The inference from the studies is that one-way or reactive communication may be inadequate for development interventions that require sustained stakeholder participation and trust.

Closing Remark/Implication

The review suggests a combination of different PR strategies in Nigerian development intervention programmes, producing outcomes such as awareness, trust, participation, collaboration and mutual understanding. However, persistent challenges involving inadequate resources, weak feedback mechanisms, misinformation, limited local-language communication and poor infrastructure, among others, undermine their effective application. This implies the need for more context-sensitive and dialogic public relations.

Limitations and Future Direction

This review was restricted to empirical studies conducted in Nigeria, which limits the transferability of its findings to other national and institutional contexts. In addition, the selection of databases and accessible sources may have resulted in the omission of some relevant studies, particularly those that were not indexed or readily available through the platforms searched. Future research should therefore adopt broader search strategies across a wider range of academic



databases and repositories and examine related constructs and variables that may provide a more comprehensive understanding of public relations in development interventions.

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AI Use Disclosure:

Google Labs was used to source relevant literature, while Scribbr was used to verify sources. ChatGPT was used to fine-tune the grammar and correct grammatical errors in the manuscript. The author takes full responsibility for the accuracy, interpretation and final content of the manuscript.
