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RADIO DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION TOOL FOR COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

by

Ahmad, Jubrin Ibrahim

Email: jubrinahmed@gmail.com

&

Anthony Orjiako Ezinwanne

Department of Mass Communication, Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia

Email: anthonyorjiako1@gmail.com

Abstract

Development at the grassroots occupies the key position in government policies. Projects and programmes executed with the aim of improving the lives of the rural populace have in most cases been a failure. Increasing concern over the failure of these programmes and projects necessitated this study. The survey research method was adopted in this study. Also, the random sampling approach was employed in the collection of data through a designed questionnaire. The data generated were carefully presented and analyzed using frequency tables and simple percentages for easy understanding. The outcome of the study has proven that an integrated approach to development communication using radio is the best strategy towards affecting development at the grassroots. The study then recommends among other things that both the traditional and modern mass media channels be used in carrying out community development programmes, especially radio, considering its unique features and advantages.

Keywords: Communication, development, radio, broadcasting, community development.

Introduction

Development communication is essential in the provision of vital information required for the transformation of rural communities. It provides details needed to encourage a change in the attitudes of people towards socio-economic change.

Development communication is simply concerned with communicating the development message. (Okunna, 2002). Supporting the above premise, Edeani (1993) adds that “it is the use of all forms of communication in the reporting, publicizing and promotion of development at all levels of a society”. Therefore, it is not out of place to say that development communication serves as an instrument for the provision of information and mobilization of the entire rural folks for development at the grassroots.

The rate of development at the grassroots seems so slow that they have either been unnoticed or neglected for decades. If community development has in the past been that slow and therefore produced minor results, then the rural machinery or agent for development must be faulty. This accounts for why Akonobi (1990) believes there is the need to carefully examine the characteristics of the rural audience with a view to ascertaining the best strategies towards mobilizing them for development.

Rural and urban areas show disparity in literacy levels, and most of the population in the country live in rural areas and are grossly illiterate (National Population Census, 2001). This observation that urban residents are more literate than their rural counterparts is due to the fact that there are more educational facilities in the urban areas than in rural areas. Also, migration

from rural to urban areas regularly involves literate people. If these people need to be properly informed on how to recognize national interest, appreciate attitudinal change in order to embrace change necessary for development, then they have to learn how to keep surviving in their environment and be aware of their rights as citizens of the country. This is why Owuamalam (2004) insists that “it is development communication that can provide the needed tonic that can accelerate change and facilitate community development”.

If the populace is largely illiterate, it means that the conventional media approaches may not be strictly applicable in the provision of vital information necessary for community development. Such media require high-level literacy, economic sufficiency and basic infrastructure. Since the electronic media, (particularly radio), produce programmes in native tongues, unlike the print media to address people in most remote localities who are illiterate, it then becomes reasonably effective for use in development communication for community development. At best, the print media can play a complementary role in reinforcing the experience needed for community development.

Also, the literacy level of the rural communities makes the consumption of print media very minimal in localities. The bulk of the people neither have access nor can even read the content of the print media like newspapers, posters, books, pamphlets and magazines.

The aim to reach out to the grassroots remains the driving force for the rapid expansion of mass media facilities, but ironically, the media have been criticized as being too urbanized in content. According to Chiakaan (2013), the impact of radio diminishes as one gets away from the cities into the rural areas. Likewise, Opubor (1985) notes that the content of the mass media is oriented towards the needs of the ruling class. Udoakah (1998) also observed that the rural areas are alarmingly neglected in the same manner that the developing countries are neglected by the international news media.

Statement of problem

A number of development programmes aimed at enhancing the lives of rural dwellers have been attempted by various governments both at national and community levels. Most of these programmes failed to achieve the goals for which they were created. This could be attributed to the design and implementation resulting from a lack of effective communication strategies. Development communication strives to promote development by systematically applying the processes, strategies, and principles of communication to bring about positive social change (Akakwandu, 2015). It therefore means that before development could be said to have taken place, there must be change for the better in the lives of the people. Community development on its own part, seeks to empower individuals and groups of people by providing them with the skills they need to effect change in their own communities (Chiakaan, 2013)

Based on the background of a high level of illiteracy, lack of accessible, preferred and available media, lack of basic infrastructure and mistrust of modern media messages, it becomes pertinent to find out the best strategies towards effecting successful community development programmes in rural communities through radio.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To find out how effective radio strategizes towards bringing about community development, with a focus on the Southern Senatorial Zone, Nasarawa State.
- ii. To examine how illiteracy as a barrier to information consumption could be tackled in rural communities.
- iii. To verify the authenticity of radio in promoting rural development.
- iv. To establish best approaches in the provision of vital information necessary for community development.

Research questions

- i. How effective are radio strategies in enhancing community development?
- ii. What best ways can illiteracy as a barrier to information consumption be prevented in rural communities?
- iii. How veritable is radio as a tool for community development?
- iv. What approaches are best for providing vital information for community development?

Conceptual clarification

Communication

Sambe (2005) defines communication as “the process of exchanging, transmitting, transferring, expressing or imparting ideas, sentiments, information or opinion between individuals, groups or organizations”. This definition reveals deeply that communication is something that goes on over something that is shared between or among parties involved in it. Communication therefore is all about the exchange or sharing of information, ideas, views, emotions, gifts, etc.

Development

Development is a process. Even the highly developed states are still undergoing developmental challenges. Development in human society is a continuum. The process however showcases change, progress, and improvement in the quality of people's lives. This accounts for why development is multidimensional. For Okunna, (2022) “Development is a process of change which aims at achieving self-reliance and improved living conditions for the underprivileged majority of the population”. Development therefore means progress in the economic, social, political and cultural realities of a people.

Development Communication

Development communication is the use of all forms of communication in the reporting, publicizing and provision of development at all levels of society. (Edeani, 2002). Thus, it can be said that development communication is concerned with communicating the development message.

Rural Development

Rural development is the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in rural areas, often relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas. Rural development is traditionally centered on the exploitation of land-intensive natural resources such as agriculture and forestry.

Radio

Ahmad, J. I and Anthony, O.E (2022) define radio as an electronic process of sending and receiving messages through the air, using electromagnetic waves. It is also about the activity of broadcasting programmes for people to listen to the programmes being broadcast (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 6th edition). Radio is everywhere. Taxi drivers, farmers, herders, and other menial workers pursue their daily endeavours with their radio. Importantly, however, this expansion has not made radio any less sensitive to its social and development roles. Within a few years in existence, radio metamorphosed from being an object of private concern to a political and development instrument in the hands of government and NGOs.

Review of related literature

Development occurs when there are changes in a society positively inclined for the betterment of people living in it. Looking at development from the same angle, Uche (1999) in Ciboh (2005) asserts: that development is a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced in a social system for higher per capita income, living standards by modern methods and improved social organization. It is the continuous process of harnessing resources in a manner compatible with culture for equality, liberty, freedom, justice, happiness and progress. It is a spontaneous, nonlinear, irreversible process inherent in all societies which implies structural differentiation and factual specialization which can be stimulated by external factors and measures.

The definition above no doubt unveils the fact that development is simply continuous; it does not start in one place and ends there. It does not take place today just to end the next day. As such it is a process. This defines the sustainable nature of development.

Radio on the other hand is seen as the system of sending sounds over a distance by transmitting electric signals. Radio on the basic available definition is a broadcast that limits itself to the transmission of messages which are aurally received by members of the public. This defines the fact that radio is a limited sensory broadcast channel; limiting itself to only sound transmission, requiring just one sensory organ (ear, hearing, listening) of its audience. Transmitted radio messages or programmes can reach the public as a result of what is technically known as metre bands. These bands are internationally recognized, namely: the short waves (SW), medium waves or amplitude modulation (MW or AM) and frequency modulation (FM) bands.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on two theories. First is the Uses and Gratifications theory of mass communication. It recognizes the notion of an active, obstinate and unyielding audience. This theory therefore seems appropriate for this study since it explains why change occurs when information is consistent with people's needs and interests. This is because the gratifications to be derived serve as motivating factors towards change as envisaged by the communicator, source or change agent. This theory postulated by Elihu Katz et al argues that “media do not do things to people; rather people do things with the media”. This then suggests that the influence of the media is limited to what people allow it to be.

The second theory employed in this study is the development media theory. This arose from attempts by media scholars to give a fair description of the nature and character of the media system in developing countries. Folarin (1998) supports this by saying that “the theory seeks to explain the normative behaviour of the press in countries that are conventionally classified as developing or third world. These are countries with differing political and economic arrangement, having large populations, high poverty rate, low income and high illiteracy, among others.”

Some of the tenets of this theory according to Chiakaan (2006) cited in McQuail (1987) include the following:

- i. To accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy.
- ii. Restriction of media freedom in the interest of the economic priorities and developmental needs of society.
- iii. Priority in media content should be given to the national culture and language.
- iv. The media should give priority in news and information to links with other developing countries which are close culturally, geographically and politically.
- v. The media in this case radio are therefore seen as partners with the government and the

governed to accelerate the wave of development. This they do genuinely and truly, providing adequate information to the society, educating and galvanizing support for government programmes and policies. This makes for enhanced mobilization and participation in state affairs for the purpose of development.

Methodology and Sources of Data

The study employed a survey research method to generate data. The survey was used because it is a more natural way of studying any issue. Moreover, it is less expensive compared to the amount of data obtained from it.

Even though the data obtained from secondary sources were used, the main source of data was the primary source of a questionnaire. In addition, an oral interview was conducted to complement the questionnaires. A structured questionnaire was designed and administered to respondents in the affected areas with multiple sampling employed in collecting data.

The researchers concentrated on local governments within the Southern Senatorial zone of Nasarawa state comprising: Lafia, Awe, Obi, Keana and Doma. This choice is not unconnected to the fact that the zone is still underdeveloped compared to other senatorial zones in the state. A sample size of twenty (20) residents from each of the five Local Government areas selected randomly was carefully studied, bringing the population of the study to one hundred (100). The respondents include youths, adults and the aged; both male and female.

Furthermore, the researchers employed simple random sampling in this regard. Meanwhile, data about the population of various local governments in the state were obtained from the state population commission.

Data collected are presented and analyzed using frequency tables and simple percentages for easy understanding.

Data presentation/analysis

Table 1. Gender of respondents

Sex	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	80	80
Female	20	20
Total	100	100

Source: field survey, 2023

Data in the table above shows that the majority of the sampled respondents are males. This may not be completely shocking and out of place as women are not seen with portable radio sets in most cases.

Table 2. Age of respondents

Options	Respondents	Percentage (%)
18-30	18	18
31-45	50	50
46-above	22	22
Total	100	100

Source: field survey, 2023

Information represented in the table unveils the fact that adults constitute a majority of the sampled population. This is good enough as it will give credence to the research considering the maturity of the respondents.

Table 3. Respondents' educational background

Options	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Primary school	38	38
Secondary school	50	50
Tertiary education	12	12
Total	100	100

Source: field survey, 2023

From the table above, it is obvious that the sampled respondents are knowledgeable about understanding and assimilating different developmental programmes broadcast via radio.

Table 4. Do you have a radio set?

Options	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	80	80
No	16	16
Undecided	4	4
Total	100	100

Source: field survey, 2023

Information in the table above is an indication that the majority of the respondents have access to radio sets despite living in rural areas. This is an indication of their willingness to be informed.

Table 5. How do you access/listen to programmes on the radio?

Options	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Radio	70	70
Mobile phone	15	15
Internet	5	5
Total	100	100

Source: field survey, 2023

Data above proves that the respondents have more access to information through radio compared to other media.

Table 6. Are you familiar with any radio instructional/developmental programmes?

Options	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	30	30
No	60	60
Undecided	10	10
Total	100	100

Source: field survey, 2023

Information from this table makes it clear that despite the fact that the majority of the respondents have radio sets and listen to its programmes, it is however obvious that there are only a few developmental programmes aired on the radio. This indeed calls for concern.

Table 7. To what extent has radio programmes/messages impacted you?

Options	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Immensely	70	70
Scarcely	25	25
Not at all	5	5
Total	100	100

Source: field survey, 2023

Data here is a clear indication that radio programmes/messages have a huge impact on the respondents. This is suggested by the information in the table above.

Table 8. Has radio enhanced the level of literacy in your community through its programmes?

Options	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	75	75
No	20	20
Undecided	5	5
Total	100	100

Source: field survey, 2023

While some of the respondents disagree that radio programmes have improved literacy level among them, 75% of others remain affirmative.

Table 9. How would you rate radio programmes on community development?

Options	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Good	60	60
Fair	35	35
Poor	5	5
Total	100	100

Source: field survey, 2023

Information presented in the table above reveals that radio developmental programmes are influential and impactful to the respondents. The table above is proof.

Discussion of findings

Data in the tables above have proven that the majority of the people are knowledgeable enough to handle the questionnaire and do justice accordingly. While revealing that the male folk constitute a majority of the sampled respondents; showing their activeness, it is also discovered that the respondents are mainly adults and mature enough, thus have been carefully selected for this study. This is evident in the fact that over 80 percent have a radio set and thus can access information on developmental programmes compared to other media such as television, internet, print, etc.

Further analysis of the information obtained reveals that despite the fact that a few developmental programmes are produced and broadcast on radio, the respondents believe that radio still remains a very viable tool for community development. This is why 75 percent of the respondents are affirmative that radio community developmental programmes are impactful and enhance their literacy level.

Conclusion

The outcome of the study has proven that an integrated approach to development communication using radio is the best strategy towards affecting development at the grassroots. While other available approaches towards the transformation of a community may be employed where necessary, radio remains a veritable and authentic medium for the development of communities considering its unique features of portability, accessibility and friendliness. The use of local dialects in addressing the rural audience through packaged programmes on radio is essential and must not be relegated to the background.

Knowledge and information are crucial for people to respond to the opportunities and challenges of socio-economic and technological changes; this accounts for why the radio as a medium of communication must be seen and utilized in tackling illiteracy among rural dwellers. This is because meaningful, developmental communication is mainly anchored on sharing meanings and trying to affect or influence behaviour. This research has established the fact that most key radio developmental programmes executed with the aim of transforming the lives of rural communities will see the light of the day if well planned and executed. Planning therefore remains key in overall community development. The study has amongst other fruitful outcomes x-rayed the role of radio as a veritable mechanism towards grassroot development.

While encouraging positive change in the attitudes of people at the grassroots and beyond towards socio-cultural, economic and political growth, it has however improved their literacy level by making them acquainted with communication roles in human and nation building. This is evident in the people's strong will to accept, adapt, tolerate, become patriotic and shun unnecessary quest for urban migration. Generally, this study has shown that the best mass medium needed for overall development at the grassroots is radio.

Recommendations

Based on the data collected and from the findings of this study, it is therefore recommended that more radio programmes aimed at transforming communities be enhanced and well-packaged for general enlightenment. There is a need to pay keen attention to the provision of more educational facilities in the rural areas to avoid incidences of unnecessary migration to urban areas, but rather learn how to survive in their environment and be aware of their rights as citizens of the country.

In addition to the introduction and use of local languages and dialects in the course of radio developmental programmes to accommodate the illiterate people, the study further recommends that both the traditional and modern mass media channels be used in carrying out community development programmes, especially the radio, considering its unique features and advantages.

Government, non-governmental organizations and other well-meaning individuals must rise to the occasion of investing handsomely in programmes that will enlighten and enhance growth in rural communities. For instance, construction and establishment of schools, including tertiary institutions are very easy and fast means of transforming rural communities irrespective of how primitive those localities are.

The provision of social amenities such as pipe-borne water, electricity, accessible roads, education, communication and security will undoubtedly transform rural communities and by this, the rural dwellers will live contentedly without unnecessarily craving for migration. The role of communication and feedback mechanisms cannot be overemphasized. The rural dwellers should be provided a platform through which their voices can always be heard. They should by this mechanism be given an audience and attention to their plights. Thus, they should always be kept abreast with goings on within and outside their environment. Adequate security should be made available at rural communities for overall protection of lives and properties.

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