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RURAL BROADCASTING AS A HARBINGER OF DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Rural broadcasting is crucial for development communication and ensuring the participation of rural people in programs that affect their welfare. It plays a vital role in raising awareness, empowering citizens, and fostering collaboration. Communication is crucial for the development of any society. However, the lack of a clear government policy on community broadcasting is a major obstacle. Rural broadcasting aims to disseminate development-oriented messages and empower rural communities by providing information for economic decision-making. It is widely recognized as a vehicle for national development. Rural radio programs serve as a source of education and enlightenment on various topics, promoting literacy and awareness of social issues. Overall, rural broadcasting can contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable development process.

Keywords: Rural Broadcasting, Harbinger, Development, Communication.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is central to the development of any society. Nwosu (1990) observes that development experiences have continued to point to the fact that communication is central to rural and national development and that its catalytic effect on the development of the other sectors of a nation's economy should not be neglected or underplayed. This underscores the strategic place communication plays in rural development.

Nwosu's submission is true because a majority of the Nigerian population resides in rural areas where access to basic amenities is grossly in short supply. Hence a majority of people are living in abject poverty and deprivation, and as a result, they are completely cut off from government intervention programmes.

Development communication via the establishment of rural radio or television will ensure that the rural people are accorded recognition and thus participate in development programs that concern their welfare and well-being. But is it unfortunate that rural broadcasting which

is supposed to be a vehicle to actualise this noble objective has not been accorded the much-needed attention by the government. One major reason that is attributed to this issue is the lack of an articulate policy spelled out by the government regarding community broadcasting in the country.

Konkwo (2012) throws more light on this when he says that the relegation to the background of rural broadcasting in Nigeria is attributed to bad government policies. Even though the government has expanded the signals of its networks across the country, most of these signals are only received in the state's capitals and some surrounding communities. Actual rural broadcasting is yet to take off in the country. The position of this study is that if rural broadcasting is given its rightful place, it will be an important instrument in bringing development to the rural people.

RURAL BROADCASTING

Rural areas generally refer to areas in a country that are not fully developed. They are areas in a nation where you still have highly traditional lifestyles that cannot be found in urban areas or centers. Udoaka (1998, p. 49), cited in Asemah, Anum and Edegoh (2013, p. 21) avers that when the word 'rural' is mentioned in Africa, certain things are conjured in our minds. These images, according to the Udoaka Center on acute un-development and poverty manifest themselves in the form of bad roads, lack of water supply, poor housing, poor sanitation and a high rate of illiteracy. He further observes that the word brings to mind geographic locations in Africa, with populations of hungry, wretched-looking people and stunted, kwashiorkor riddled children. It conjures the image of a people, who suffer on the farms, from morning to evening, but whose harvest is not commensurate with the efforts and time spent; it conjures the image of people who are starving, eating at best, once in a day after returning from the market.

According to Asemah (2011), rural broadcasting connotes the dissemination and transmission of social development programmes to the rural people, to affect their behaviour positively. He went further to assert that it entails the use of community radio and television to carry out development programmes for rural dwellers. To Iyimoga cited in Akene (1992), rural development is a call for massive and multi-pronged efforts, which should not only seek to boost production but also create and spread employment and root out the fundamental causes of poverty, illiteracy, and diseases.

Rural broadcasting, therefore, represents one of the best ways of reaching rural people with development messages. The rationale behind rural broadcasting is to ensure that development-oriented messages are communicated to the rural people. It is pertinent to note that development communication cannot be successfully carried out without the engagement of rural broadcasting. Rural broadcasting has become an appropriate medium for reaching rural areas, which at the moment are still lacking behind in accessing events and activities via modern communication devices which tend to be urban-orientated in programme content. The objectives of rural broadcasting according to Konkwo (2007) include the following:

a. The sensitisation of the rural people towards appreciating themselves and their environment and how to improve them.

b. Enlightening the rural people to participate in their civic duties and enable them to understand their rights and obligations as citizens of the country.
c. To empower the rural people with information to the advantage of the economic programmes and policies of the government.
d. To enlighten the rural people to appreciate the need for personal hygiene and general environmental sanitation.
e. To enable the citizens to participate in the political decision-making process.
f. To enable the rural man to understand his constitutional right and to be voted for.
g. To enable the rural people to make rational, correct and judicious economic decisions based on the information they obtained from the broadcast media and other means of communication.
h. To foster the education of the rural child through the production and transmission of appropriate educational programmes.

The importance of rural broadcasting as a vehicle for bringing national development has been widely held among communication experts. This concern was expressed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and World Bank report of 2004 recognising the importance of community media as tools for the promotion of democratization and development (Buckley, 2005 cited in Ekeli and Enobakhare, 2012). Motivated by this realization, several countries began experimenting with the effect of rural radio in mobilizing their people to embrace government policies and programmes geared toward development. Thus, countries like Mali, Senegal, South Africa, India, Ghana, Kenya etc. have reaped tremendous benefits from establishing chains of community media in their respective countries.

However, it is disheartening to note that rural or community broadcasting is yet to be firmly rooted in Nigeria. This has resulted in the alienation of the rural people regarding government intervention programmes in the past and the present dispensation. This is seen in the failure of government programmes like Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Poverty Alleviation Programme, War Against Indiscipline, and a host of other laudable programmes meant to uplift the lives of the rural dwellers.

DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

To associate development with a particular definition is not possible. Definitions of what constitutes development are, therefore, uncountable. The definitions are numerous because of the multifaceted nature of the concept. Development means different things to different people depending on their backgrounds and the context within which they apply it.

Asemah (2010), cited in Asemah, Edegoh and Anum (2013, p. 21) sees development as a gradual process of bringing about positive attitudinal change in the people. It is a continuous process of improving their living conditions, through positive change. The essence of development according to Asemah is the development of people with change in their attitude, leading to change of habit. This means that just changing things without a concurrent change of habit or attitude is not a healthy development. Development is seen as a changing process of knowledge, attitude and practices.

Agba (2002, p. 268), cited in Bariku (2007) opines that development communication emerged as an attempt by developing countries, especially Africa, to channel communication towards development ends.

Corroborating Agba's view, Udoakah (1996) avers that development communication is a "remonstrance" against Western domination of the world information system; it has become a new philosophy of the use of modern media of mass communication in developing countries. He further opines that development communication is designed to satisfy the needs of developing countries. He also went further to say that it is an effort to make news and information from an African perspective to solve Africa's problems. Africa as a developing continent has been plunged into myriads of developmental challenges since the disarticulation of their economy by the British imperialist through colonialism. After the end of colonialism, the continent has been struggling to regain its natural resources. This has left the country in a deplorable condition where poverty, hunger and underdevelopment persist at an alarming rate.

In a nutshell, development communication consists of information about government plans and efforts to improve the standard of living of the populace; appeals to the citizens to adopt new ideas and ways of doing things; news of struggle for a better living and news of achievements to spur or inspire citizens for co-operation (Udoakah, 1998).

RURAL BROADCASTING (RADIO) AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Since the dawn of civilisation about two and half million years ago, every society's growth, survival and continuity depends on among other things, a system of communication, through which people exchange ideas, feeling; an economic system for the production of goods and services, a health system to counteract disease and ensure human reproduction; a socio-political system to maintain control and order and a defence system to protect their territories against external aggression (Ugboaja, 2010).

Rural radio programme serves as a source of cultural, political, health and other educational and enlightenment programmes for the masses, leading them towards self-actualisation and national development. It is in this light that Okam (2013) submits that much of the failure that attends government mass–oriented programmes is traceable to the fact that policymakers at the national level fail to utilise this powerful and credible medium. Radio can be used as a source of entertainment through arts and cultural festivals, musicals and dramatic performances, by local singing groups, masquerades and other music and drama groups.

The issue of language is very important for information access and the use of rural broadcasting bridges the language barrier by using local languages for programmes, thus achieving wider coverage and reaching diverse listeners. By using local languages these radio stations stimulate participation and support in communities and create a sense of belonging and ownership. Communities are generally empowered by information broadcasted in a language they understand.

RURAL BROADCASTING AS A HARBINGER OF DEVELOPMENT

Every community development initiative as a social development project requires effective communication among various groups of people who are involved in such development projects in the participating communities. Rural broadcasting can be a powerful harbinger of development by educating, informing and empowering rural communities.

- Educating rural communities

Rural broadcasting can be used to educate rural people on a variety of topics, such as health practice, hygiene, skills etc it can also promote literacy and raise awareness of important social issues such as gender equality and environmental protection. By educating rural communities, rural broadcasting can help to improve their quality of life and increase their productivity.

- Empowering rural communities

Rural broadcasting can empower rural people by giving them a voice and a platform to share their ideas and concerns. It can also promote community participation in decision-making and build social cohesion and solidarity. By empowering rural communities, rural broadcasting can help to create a more inclusive and sustainable development process.

- Informing rural communities

Rural broadcasting can inform rural people by providing news and information on a range of topics, including agriculture, health, education, and governance. Giving a voice to marginalized groups and amplifying their stories.

CONCLUSION

Rural broadcasting plays a vital role in community development by raising awareness of development issues, empowering citizens, and fostering collaboration. Development communication via the establishment of rural radio will ensure that the rural people are accorded recognition and thus participate in development programmes that concern their welfare and well-being. But is it unfortunate that rural broadcasting which supposes to be a vehicle to actualise this noble objective has not been accorded the much needed attention by the government. Even though the government has expanded the signals of its networks across the country, most of these signals are only received in the state's capitals and some surrounding communities. Actual rural broadcasting is yet to take off in the country. The development message will not be able to get their target audience (rural society) with rural broadcasting leading the way.

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