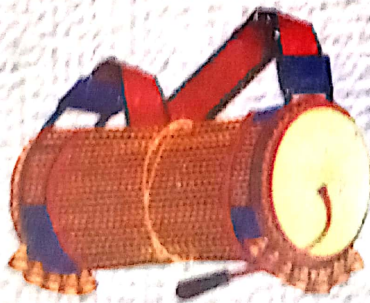


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COMMUNITY RADIO AS A TOOL FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

BY

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Abstract

For any development programme to succeed, the people it is intended for must be actively engaged. To reach the people, there has to be communication. To effectively communicate with the people, the use of the mass media is inevitable. Governments, the world over, need the mass media for dissemination of information to be able to mobilize their people for developmental purposes. This article therefore dwelt on the importance of the mass media in the dissemination of information on development by the government to the people. Employing an analytical approach, the article recommended community radio as a medium through which the government can effectively disseminate development information to the rural populace. For effectiveness, messages should be well prepared for specific audience to be able to effectively reach them.

Introduction

Communication is no doubt essential to human existence. One way or the other, we are engaged in one form of communication or the other daily. Communication, when properly employed, can work together with other social variables to facilitate social change. Rural development is one of such social changes. Sustainable rural development cannot be imposed from above. It will not take root unless people across the country are actively engaged (DEFRA 2002:12). The people have to be actively involved for it to make serious impact.

It is for this reason that communication and development experts and practitioners in Africa, Asia, Latin America have spent valuable time searching for methods, approaches, philosophies, techniques or strategies that will help them to put communication to the fullest and most effective use in achieving their various development objectives. (Nwosu 2000:70).

If communication is so important for rural development and for developmental programmes in general, what is then communication? What is development communication and how have these been applied to achieve development programmes. These are pertinent questions that need answers.

This paper is based on the Development Media Theory. Hachten (1992:103) in an

attempt to update the Four Theories of the Press propounded by Wilbur Schramm came up with some other concepts of the press, of which one is the Developmental Media Theory. This is the most significant and interesting of all his concepts. The theory was developed principally because of some common conditions of developing nations which limits the application of the other theories to developing countries of Asia and Africa.

Media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy.

Freedom of the media should be open to economic priorities and development needs of the society. Media should give priority in their content to the national culture and languages.

Media should give priority in news and information to link with other developing countries which are close geographically, culturally and politically.

Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedom in their information gathering and dissemination tasks. In the interest of development ends, the state has a right to intervene in or restrict media operations and devices of censorship, subsidy and direct control can be justified.

Another relevant theory to this paper is the Agenda Setting Theory. According to McCombs and Shaw (1992) cited by Nwabueze (2005:4) "the media tell us not what to think, but

what to think about. The amount of attention therefore given to an issue in the press affects the level of importance assigned to that issue by mass media audience". This is what is referred to as the "status conferral" role of the media.

The theory implies that the mass media sets agenda for public discussions, simply by defining, analyzing and interpreting issues in society. They set agenda through their news reporting, features, editorials, documentaries and cartoons focusing on particular issues. In the process, they determine topics or issues to be debated by the public.

Communication

Scholars and experts of mass communication have defined communication in various ways. Communication as been defined as a dynamic and functional interaction between individuals and among groups which takes place in a social environment. This means that communication is a social process. Communication can be defined as a process "to make something known, to exchange information, news or ideas with somebody". (Hornby 1995:229). It is therefore not a linear phenomenon. There must be the existence of a feedback.

Communication was derived from the Latin word "Communicare" which means "to talk together, confer, discuss and consult with one another". It has also been argued that the word "Communication" rather comes from another Latin word "Communis" which means 'Common'. Those who hold the view are of the opinion that communication is all about making messages or information common. (Ayanwu 2005:79)

Governments in developing countries, including Nigeria need to provide information to all facets of their respective countries. These are information concerning modern trends in technological advancements, results of research in agricultural development, sciences and other areas. Schramm (1954:249) noted that "information is one of the basic rights of mankind, and an indispensable requirement for the freedom and dignity of the world's people".

Development Communication

Development communication as a

concept, according to Ashong (1996:127) deals with the kind of media activity that is principally related with development issues and problems. Development communication implies the creation of programmes and the coverage of events that will create a climate of readiness for change and raising development consciousness, a persuasion of productive attitude, a change of all behaviour that is backward in nature, a campaign for participation and other forms of support for development programmes/projects, and the evaluation of the objective/implementation of development programmes. In other words, development communication involves educating the beneficiaries about programmes which they are supposed to benefit from. Getting involved and letting them know about the benefits of such programmes.

According to Udoakah (2004:7) development communication "is a remonstrance against Western domination of the world information market. It is a philosophy for the use of modern media of mass communication in developing countries. It is a journalism introduced to meet the developing needs of the developing nations. It is, he said further corrective, integrative and revolutionary in nature. It promotes hope and change and proclaims and extends values in society.

Development communication is a fallout of the debate and call for a New World Information Order (NWIO). It is information about government's effort to improve the living standard of its people, information about government development efforts, information to mobilize people to support government efforts and all other forms of information which are for the general good of the citizenry.

Role of the Mass Media in Rural Mobilisation

Schramm (1954:129), wrote extensively on how communication and the mass media specifically can assist in the development efforts of any society. According to him, some of the essential services mass communication can perform in developing nations include:

Widening Horizons: They are a liberating force which breaks the bond of distance and isolation by bringing what is distant near, and making what is strange understandable, the media can help bridge the transition between the

traditional and modern society.

Focusing Attention: The radio, newspaper, television and magazine, serving as watchman or watch dog, must decide what to report back.

Raising Aspirations: The building of national aspirations is one of the uses most new nations find for their radio and newspaper.

Apart from these, other communication experts have identified some specific functions of the media. Lasswell (1948) for instance, stated the functions of the press as that of surveillance, correlation parts of society and transmission of cultural heritage. A fourth one which is entertainment was later added. Uyo (1987:91) has however expanded the media functions to produce and acronym PENIISE which is:

- § Persuasion: message primarily to convince or convert its receivers;
- § Education: message primarily to instruct or teach;
- § News: message primarily to acquaint audiences with some recent events;
- § Information: message designed primarily to enrich receivers stock of knowledge;
- § Interpretation: message designed to explain issues and problems involved in events (already known).
- § Selling: message primarily aimed at inducing buying; and
- § Entertainment: messages primarily for amusement.

To these other functions, McQuail (1968:28) and Uche (1995:61) have added cultural expression and continuity, national interaction and mobilization.

Past Mass Mobilisation Efforts in Nigeria.

In the past, various efforts have been made to mobilize the Nigerian populace, both urban and rural. The most prominent which has been modified by various governments both military and civilian is the establishment of the Directorate for Social Mobilization. Its primary objective was the mass mobilization for self-reliance, social justice and economic recovery. The directorate which was officially launched in 1987 had the following functions:

- (a) Establishing an appropriate framework for the positive mobilization and education of all Nigerians towards economic recovery and development, and a new social and political order;
- (b) Awakenning the consciousness of all categories of Nigerians to their rights and obligations as citizens of Nigeria.
- (c) Inculcating in all Nigerians the value and spirit of civil responsibility, commitment to social justice and economic self reliance through mobilization and harnessing of their energies and national resources into productive use.
- (d) Sensitizing, inducting and equipping all Nigerians to fight against internal and external domination of our resources by a few individuals and groups.
- (e) Re-orienting Nigerians to shun waste and vanity and to shed all pretences to affluence in our life styles.
- (f) Promoting pride in the consumption of home produced commodities, and aid in self-reliance.
- (g) Preparing the framework for creating the basic institutions and norms of democracy at all levels of our society.
- (h) Creating consciousness about power and its use and about the proper role of government in serving the collective interest of Nigerians.

The Directorate was also to:

- § Ensure that the materials which appear in the mass media, both electronic and print are in consonance with national objectives of self-reliance, social justice, human rights, democratic norms, economic recovery and development;
- § Propagate the need to eschew all vices in public life including corruption, dishonest, electoral and census malpractices, ethnic and religious bigotry;
- § Propagate the virtues of hard work, honesty, self reliance, commitment to, and propagation of national integration;
- § Inculcate in all Nigerians the virtue of patriotism and positive participation in

national affairs;

However, in 1993 with the change of government, the National Orientation Agency (N.O.A.) Which was established by Decree No. 100 of 1993 replaced the Directorate for Social Mobilization, Self Reliance, and Economic Reliance, and Economic Recovery (MAMSER). This is as a result of the merger of the Public Enlightenment, War Against Indiscipline and National Orientation Movement divisions of the Federal Ministry of Information with MAMSER. The functions of NOA and MAMSER are fundamentally the same. (Udoakah 2004:86).

The question that then readily comes to one's mind is whether the agency which has offices in all state capitals and local government headquarters has successfully carried out its assigned functions. This is especially in the area of mobilizing Nigerians to accept and participate in governments' development programmes. For instance, how many people came out to vote during the last national general elections? What percentage of Nigerians has come to accept and participate in the monthly environmental exercise?

Experience has shown that the rural populace has not had the opportunity to adequately share in the growing experience and opportunity of the evolving national culture through media participation. Right from the colonial era, the growth of the mass media had been concentrated in the urban areas at the detriment of the rural areas. "This is unfortunate because the majority of Nigerian between 70 to 80 per cent reside in the rural areas in small settlements still depending largely on agriculture. It is estimated that not less than 70 to 80 per cent of Nigeria's 88.5 million people (1991 census) reside in the rural areas." Ashong (199:12) citing Ajayi (1987); Ibeakuzie (1987); Adeyemo (1987) and Eweka et. al. (1979).

It is however sad, that most of governments efforts to mobilize the people in the rural areas have in most cases been unsuccessful because it is either that the messages directed at them are wrongly designed and packaged or that the wrong media mix was used. The print media (newspapers, magazines, leaflets, flyers etc) for instance has the advantage of permanence but it is difficult to reach the majority of the people through the print media because most of them

are illiterate. The electronic media (radio, television, film etc) on the other hand, has the advantage of reaching more people than the print media because of its wider reach. The problem however, is that of unreliable power supply. The National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) now known as Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) has not been able to achieve its target of rural electrification over the years. Where there is electricity, it is epileptic and largely unpredictable. The only viable alternative to reach the rural populace is the radio which can be operated with batteries in the absence of electricity.

Yu-Frederick (1979) has said that it is possible to take the media to the rural populace. During its mass mobilization campaign in the 1980's China did it. Some of such efforts have been made in Nigeria. For instance, there have been the introduction of television viewing centres in some communities. This, according to Udoakah (2004:64) "is a good beginning which with thoughtfulness can become a solid base for the transformation of the rural attitude towards information acquisition and the government."

Providing just the infrastructures is not enough, reaching the people involves other things. Messages have to be designed in a way that they will highlight and examine problems and issues that need to be understood and tackled to achieve rural development or improve the quality of life for the rural dwellers. Nwosu (2002:70) said that one vital area that has engaged the attention of rural development experts is the preparing and producing of the necessary and appropriate information, education and communication (IEC) materials or packages that can be gainfully utilized for effective application of communication in rural development. It is however discouraging that most people that are supposed to prepare these materials do not have the basic and necessary training.

It is the view of this paper that one way the rural populace can be reached in Nigeria for development purpose is through the use of Community Radio. This is based on the assumption that the IEC materials to reach the people have been properly prepared and produced by rural development officers, public relations officers, information officers and other officials that are involved in preparing news, articles and features for rural development.

Community radio as a medium of mass mobilisation

Rural broadcasting in the real sense does not necessarily mean taking radio and television to the rural areas. What it actually means is taking broadcast information to people residing in rural areas. This is not to say that establishing radio stations in the rural areas is not necessary and possible. The advantages of radio as a medium of mass communication are numerous. Apart from being relatively cheap to purchase, it has the advantage of a greater reach than other media. In Nigeria today, a portable transistor radio and even a world receiver can be bought for as low as N1, 000:00 or less. Batteries can be used where there is no electricity. Radio also has the exclusive advantage of affording its listener the opportunity to listen to programmes even while engaging in other things.

In the developing countries of Asia and Africa, including Nigeria, radio has become the real mass medium for development campaigns, particularly in rural areas. Competition from other media, notwithstanding radio still remains the most promising mass medium for development in the next decades. Normally in most mass communication campaigns, the multi-media approach or media mix is normally recommended to reduce the limitations of other media involved in the campaign. The use of radio as the prominent medium has a lot of advantages.

Agba (1998:16) said that the great plus for radio everywhere is its pervasiveness. The medium scales all boundaries political, geographical and educational as created by lack of literacy. This actually makes radio handy for any campaign. Messages can be interpreted into local Languages and this makes it superior to other media of communication.

In Nigeria, the major problem facing radio as a medium of mass mobilization is that of over centralization of the stations in the urban areas. The National Broadcasting Commission which was set up by the (NBC Act No. 38 of 1992) is the regulatory body in Nigeria. Under its categories of licenses Section 2.10 there is Community Broadcasting, (campus broadcasting and rural broadcasting) which is

item 1. Recently a lot of licenses were approved by the NBC for the establishment of radio and television stations. It is either that the government has not encouraged Nigerians, or Nigerians have refused to take advantage of this very important section to establish community radio stations. To show the importance of the establishment of community radio, a brief review of the Liberian experience will be done.

Community Radio: The Liberian Experience

Community radio as a medium of mass mobilization has been successfully used in Liberia, a small West African country that has gone through a lot of crisis in the recent past. According to Kabir (2008:12), "the proliferation of the community based radio stations in Liberia is premised on the need to mobilize people at the grass root especially for the last November 2005 general elections. Besides, there was also the need to sensitise people about the on going peace process". Thus, radio became the potential tool to actualize the objective.

Today in Liberia, there are more than 50 community radio stations operating outside Monrovia, the country's capital. These stations are not sponsored by government; they are mostly sponsored by communities, private individuals and Non-governmental organizations (NGO'S). The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNIMIL) is also doing a lot in the establishment and sustainability of most of these stations.

Setting up such stations does not necessarily involve huge capital outlay. Simple and cheap equipment peculiar to broadcasting are all that is required. According to Kabir, the successful coverage of the elections had rubbed off on their significance as a veritable tool for communication especially at the grass root. They also become forces to reckon with as far as communication for development in all facets of human endeavours in Liberia is concerned.

Conclusion

Looking at the prevailing situation in Nigeria today, there is no doubt that the country needs an effective means to mobilize its people, most of whom are still living in the rural areas. It is true that a lot of efforts have been made in the past, but these efforts have not yielded much

result. This is either due to the use of the wrong media mix or the lack of communication skills on the part of those who design such messages.

Recommendations

This article is therefore recommending the use of community radio, which has been successfully used of recent to mobilize the Liberian people for elections and other development purposes. Efforts are already been made in this direction, as evidenced by the April 2005 Validation Seminar on Building Community Radio in Nigeria, held in Abuja. The Government should do more in this direction by encouraging private individuals, corporate bodies, non-governmental organizations and international bodies to assist in the establishment of community radio especially in the rural areas. This is in addition to the use of oramedia and other forms of mass communication presently in use. This will go a long way to complement other government efforts to mobilize the rural populace in its development programmes.

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