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Combating Rural Poverty in Nigeria Through Community Broadcasting

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Abstract

Community broadcasting is no doubt a necessity for effective rural development in every typical rural set up. This stems from the fact that the mass media are a major contributor to every positive development in every society. The sorry state of rural communities in Nigeria has continually begged for an urgent and transforming attention. This is the case with poor rural people in Nigeria which forms the focus of this study. To this end, the paper strongly advocates massive introduction and efficient utilization of community broadcasting in combating rural poverty so as to effectively engender the much-desired development of the

rural communities. The paper affirms that community broadcasting is the most suitable for the rural set up, and concludes that community broadcasting is a veritable tool for the promotion of communication and the creation of opportunities for programme participation. This paper further posits that community radio has brought positive impacts particularly in six the matic areas; agricultural transformation, promoting participatory democracy, lending voices to the voiceless, information/discussion forum on local issues, empowering unprivileged rural people, and contributing to good governance.

Keywords: Broadcasting, Rural Poverty, Rural development, Illiteracy

1. Introduction

Poverty is a long-standing issue and a major source of worry all over the world. Correlated to underdevelopment, ignorance, retarded growth, and illiteracy, poverty remains the scourge of society of our society. As a threat to the progress and well-being of humanity, the problem of poverty is so enormous that its reduction or elimination has become the common goal of all states and nations. It manifests itself in exposure to risk, corruption, robbery, living in squalor on the streets or in shanties or overcrowded and often poorly ventilated homes, prostitution and commercial sex work in the face of increased unemployment, high infant mortality, acute malnutrition, short life expectancy, and human degradation in general.

Rural poverty on the other hand refers to poverty in rural areas, including factors of rural society, rural economy, and political systems that give rise to the poverty found there. Rural communities typically have less well-maintained infrastructure and also face disadvantages in terms of legal and social protections, with women and marginalized communities frequently having hard times accessing land, education and other support systems that help with economic development.

Community broadcasting serves local communities, reflecting the diversity of their views and needs, and provides access to volunteer participants. It is public broadcasting not operated by a government or a government agency with the sole aim of addressing the needs and problems of rural dwellers.

In essence therefore, community broadcasting can be employed to pass across vital information about latest techniques in agriculture, trends in agricultural extension services, science and technology, job opportunities or skill acquisition programmes, etc. Moemeka (2012) remarks that a local broadcast media like radio, if well managed and functional, will provide a continuous flow of educational information on all aspects that affects the lives of rural communities and also arouse their awareness with a view to changing what is detrimental to their lives.

Radio just like television is a tool that can be used to bring about positive attitudinal changes in the rural areas through educating, informing and enlightening the rural populace. In addition, radio helps to achieve development, both in the rural and urban areas, as issues of development are aired to the audience in the form of various programmes and these individuals are exposed to happenings in and around their society, through listening to programmes. Radio can be employed to pass vital information about the right attitude, behaviour, knowledge, techniques and skills, which are expected from the members of the public. Ojebode (2003) opines that that with few years of its emergence, radio has metamorphosed from being an object of

private concern, to a political and development instrument in the hands of governments and NGOs. The information dispersing and the enlightenment role of radio is the commonest of its functions. This disseminating function according to Asemah (2011), covers information to people's alertness to health, agriculture, education, economy, politics, etc. In this case, lectures, news, entertainment, drama, discussions etc., can be used.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Nigeria is marked by poverty and other development challenges. It is confronted with the problems of high population, malnutrition, low infrastructure, unemployment and many more. A cursory look at the living conditions of many Nigerians living in rural areas reveals a squalid existence, abject poverty with most rural dwellers living in ramshackle dwellings.

Moreover, most of the people living in these areas are illiterate, school drop-outs, are denied basic amenities and medical care services, and facilities like clean and portable water, electricity, good roads, schools, hospitals, etc. The prevalent level of illiteracy and lack of information in these areas has led to underdevelopment as majority living in rural areas do not have access to information that can help stem growth and development as well as knowledge and understanding about diseases and preventive measures that can help curb or eradicate it which can help in reducing the mortality rate in these areas.

One of the elements that can help create conditions and accelerate development in rural areas is the provision of information and knowledge through community broadcasting. It is on this note that the study intends to assess how rural poverty can be combated through community broadcasting.

1.2 Objective of the study

Generally, the study aims at assessing use of community broadcasting in combating rural poverty in Nigeria. In addition, the study will be guided by the following objectives:

- Examining the extent to which the broadcast media are involved in communicating poverty alleviation programmes to the rural people.
- Examining how community broadcasting has contributed in information dissemination and awareness creation towards combating rural poverty and achieving community development.

2. Definition of terms

Rural: A geographical hinterland with settlers who are predominantly farmers or unskilled labourers. It is associated with acres of bushy land with scattered/sparsely buildings.

Poverty: A state of life whereby one lacks the power to provide or have access to some basic life necessities, thereby incapacitating the person from meeting up with the demands of daily living.

Broadcasting: It is a system of communication that employs a combination of motion pictures and sound or sound only to reach out to a heterogeneous audience to educate, inform or entertain them through radio or television or cinema.

Broadcast Programmes: This is the practice of organizing and ordering of broadcast media programmes (internet,

television, radio, etc.) in a weekly, monthly, quarterly or season-long schedule.

Rural Development: Rural development is a strategy that is designed to improve the economic and social conditions of a specific group of people, that is, the rural people. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest, among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas.

3. Review of concepts

Radio is a medium of communication through which the individuals share the world around them and beyond their immediate environment. Radio in a country should influence social and, especially the political fabric. The social objective of using radio to mobilize people in Nigeria entails the area of education, information and entertainment. It is essential to provide through radio and television a kind of general education for people, irrespective of their educational background. This would be by a combination of formal and informal form of education. Electronic media generally, according to Asemah (2014), provide the public with information. Electronic media serve as watchdog and do not abuse power. For education, there is thrill of learning from the source material. Radio as an electronic media, is expected to play the role of improving and changing social, cultural, political and technological thinking, which will, in the long run, have positive results on the process of rural development. This sensitive role expected to be played by radio is not far from the fact that it shows special qualities in disseminating information. Radio is so powerful that it brings political, economic and social news to any community or group of communities faster than other medium.

Nwuneli, cited in Asemah (2013) in his own contribution on the role of radio, says, it has brought stimulus into the house, brings about competitions within families, thereby, grooming people who will contribute positively to the process of development. This fact agrees with the idea of Wigwe (2015) because of the emphasis on grassroots development. Salama (2013) notes that radio mirrors the society in programmes like drama that presents issues relevant to society in action which creates easy understanding and learning. It informs and educates the listeners in its discussion and documentary programmes. It entertains in its light programmes like musicals, sports comedy and dances. It also seeks to improve the society in its special occupational programmes geared towards agricultural business and other related areas.

Rural poverty refers to poverty in rural areas, including factors of rural society, rural economy, and political systems that give rise to the poverty found there. Rural areas, because of their spread-out populations, typically have less well-maintained infrastructure and a harder time accessing markets, which tend to be concentrated in population centers. Rural communities also face disadvantages in terms of legal and social protections, with women and marginalized communities frequently having hard times accessing land, education and other support systems that help with economic development.

Community radio is a radio service that broadcast content that is popular and relevant to a local, specific audience. Community radio is when local people produce and broadcast their own programs and participate in operating the station. It is community space for people to meet and collaborate and it leads to individual creativity and self-

empowerment. With community radio, cultural, political and artistic voices excluded elsewhere get heard, individuals and communities are enriched, and community volunteers are trained and given a central role in radio production, operation and program development. Youths also get a chance to participate. Stations remain responsive to community needs and consistently seek input from listeners. Development as a concept is broad and therefore, does not subject itself to a single definition. It indeed covers a wide range of human endeavours. According to Asemah (2010), development is a process of change in attitude, social structure and general acceleration of economic growth, through reduction of poverty and inequality. Asemah (2011) notes that development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material wellbeing. The achievement of any of these aspects is very much tied in with the state of the society as a whole. Development involves the creation of opportunities for the realization of human potentials. Human beings have certain basic requirements, which must be satisfied so that they can properly function in the society. Among these are enough food, employment and the elimination of the kinds of inequality, which lead to poverty. Asemah (2010) 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.

4. Theoretical framework

Development Media Theory

The development media theory has propounded by McQuail in 1987 holds that the media have a role to play in facilitating the process of economic development in the developing countries. According to the development media theory, the media are to be used to serve the general good of the nation. The media are seen as agents of economic development and social change in any community thus, the theory says that the media should be used to complement government's efforts by carrying out programmes that will lead to positive behavioural change among the people.

The development media theory according to Okunna (1999), accepts that economic development and nation building should take precedence over some freedom of the press and of individuals. In addition, the theory advocates that the mass media should assist the government in the task of nation building and that government should control the media as well as journalist to achieve this goal. The theory is relevant to the study because it lays emphasis on using the media to develop the society. This implies that the media have the capacity to positively affect the society. Thus, the media need to be employed to bring about social, political and economic development in the society.

Democratic participant media theory

The theory was propounded by Dennis McQuail in 1987. The theory simply lays emphasis on the need for popular participation and plurality in the ownership and access to the media. The bottom line of this theory is that, every individual and every part of the society—religious institutions like churches, mosques and many others in the society should have access to the media so that they too can air their views about happenings in the society.

Yarosan and Asemah (2008) cited in Asemah (2011, p.154), say that democratic participant media theory stresses the

need for plural is min place of monopolization and in the place of centralism, it advocates decentralization and localism. In relating democratization to communication, Mac Bride *et al.*, (1980, p.166), defined democratization as the process whereby the individual becomes an active partner and not mere object of communication; the variety of message sex changed increases and the extent and quality of social representation or participation in communication are augmented.

Communication necessarily reflects the nature of the society in which it operates. Thus, inequality in wealth distribution inevitably create disparities between those who are well-served and those who are deprived communication; agap between a cultural elite and illiterate or semiliterate masses is a gap between the information-rich and the information poor. In application of this theory to reducing poverty through rural broadcasting, every individual should have the right of access to the media. The development communication programmes are not to be imposed on the audience rather research should show what the audience needs there by increasing participation. Stressing more on this, Asemah (2011, p.154), says that this theory calls for horizontal in place of the top-down communication, which is a concern for feedback, socio-political communication and an acknowledgement of the feedback so as to realise the completed communication circuit.

Development Communication and Community Broadcasting

Information is raw material for development of both urban and rural dwellers. Prosperity, progress, and development of any nation depend upon the nation's ability to acquire, produce, access, and use pertinent information. A report on older rural people (2008, p.3) indicates that; Access to information and advice is a key resource for local people in maintaining active and independent lives. Access to information is also critical to letting people know their entitlements to welfare benefits and sources of support to overcome social exclusion.

Information is the life blood of any society and vital to the activities of both the government and private sectors. Bell (1974, p.4) cited in Harande (2009, p.1) holds the view that "the dependence upon information to create innovation and change, places a high premium on the ability of (developing countries) nations to access and use information to create advances in society". The development of countries globally cannot be achieved without the development of the rural community. This is because 75 to 80 percent of the people in developing countries living in the rural areas need positive, relevant and prompt attention in their daily activities. People in rural areas whether literate or not should have access to any kind of information which will help them to become capable and productive in their social and political obligations, to become better informed citizens generally.

The Role of Community Radio in Combating Rural Poverty

The provision of information and skills has gained popularity in the quest to empower communities with community broadcasting as a unique and effective tool. Chapman *et al.*, (2003) ^[2] reported that the growth of rural broadcast stations reflects both the improvements in information technologies and the shifting of development

paradigm towards a more participatory style of information and knowledge transfer. Kumar (2004) identified radio as an avenue for participatory communication and as a tool relevant in both economic and social development.

Community radio is a type of radio service that offers a model of radio broadcasting beyond commercial and public service. It serves geographic communities and communities' interest. The content of broadcasting is largely popular and relevant to a local/specific audience but which are often overlooked commercial or mass-media broadcasters. Rural radio stations are operated, owned, and driven by the communities they serve and provide same channel for facilitating individuals, groups, and communities to tell their own diverse stories, to share experiences, and in a media rich world to become active creators and contributors of media. In many parts of the world today, community radio acts as a vehicle for the community and voluntary sector, civil society, agencies, NGOs and citizens to work in partnership to promote community development. By the core aims and objectives of this model of broadcasting, community radio stations often serve their listeners by offering a variety of content that is not necessarily provided by the larger commercial radio stations.

Combating Rural Poverty in Nigeria Through Community Broadcasting

Community broadcasting plays a significant role at the grass root level towards the attainment of rural development. Through community broadcasting, issues of poverty, agriculture, gender in equality, education, social problems among others could be the focus for programming. In exploring the importance of sharing information locally and the opening up of wider information networks for farmers in rural areas with reference to vernacular radio programmes, Chapman, *et al.*, (2003) ^[2] found that community broadcasting remains effective in improving the sharing of agricultural information to remote rural farming communities. Rural Radio and television programmes in this regard provides asset of participatory communication techniques that support agricultural extension efforts by using local languages to communicate directly with farmers and listeners' groups. Using the Most Significant Change (MSC) process, Walters *et al.*, (2011) assessed the impact of community radio in Nigeria and concluded that effective radio activities can make a significant change in a community's life.

Through media skills training and access to the air waves, a community broadcast facilitates a number of capacity building activities. The exchange of information, networking of groups, the provision of skills and training and these undoubtedly are key elements of developing a community. Again, a radio facility for a community facilitates the promotion of awareness of community groups and facilities in the area as well as providing the avenue for the empowerment of these groups to use radio/television to promote themselves and to speak directly to the community. For its proximate location to its clients, community broadcasting serves a local community of its interest. It is accessible to the community in terms of ownership, decision making and programme output. In majority of cases, programming is produced by the community, with focus on local concerns and issues. Unlike in the case of the main stream media, rather than merely talking about the community, the people themselves make the programmes.

This strengthens local culture with the recognition that this is their station; it becomes a forum for a wide diversity of local opinions and views. As a result of these unique qualities, community programmes are an effective tool to help fight extreme poverty, and organizations and innovators have gotten really creative in using it for anything from education, to campaigning, to community-building.

5. Discussion of findings

The media to a large extent is involved and has created an appreciable awareness concerning poverty alleviation programmes but often neglect the poor rural dwellers who need information and development the most.

The community broadcasting media uses the radio in particular to reach out to those in the rural areas with the aim of improving awareness and knowledge of solutions to community development problems with in various sectors including culture, rural development, education, hygiene and sanitation, agriculture and local governance among rural people.

Studies conducted overtime has proven that rural broadcasting has given the rural people more orientation and empowerment and has broadened the horizon of the rural people.

Many people in the rural areas own a radio set aimed at receiving information and news and by broadcasting different types of local contents in the form of news, entertainment, educational programmes, poverty alleviation programmes, etc., the communication gap between the information rich and the information poor is bridged.

The concept of community radio has led to an increased enrolment in schools through the broadcast of literacy programmes on the station and as a result, illiteracy and school dropout syndrome has reduced. Due to the station's enlightenment in contemporary agricultural techniques and new technology and an increased use of fertilizers by farmers, rural farmers have experienced better crop yield and production which helps improve the quality of life of rural residents owing to the economic value of access to vital agric-based information.

The study supported by precious research works has recorded an increased awareness on hygiene and sanitation issues in rural communities as well as enhanced social cohesion, manifesting itself in several ways including friendship and conflict reduction. Moreso, listeners have been able to broaden their horizon of knowledge through the opportunity provided to them by the radio as rural broadcasting media have to an appreciable extent are involved in communicating poverty alleviation programmes to the rural people. These poverty alleviation programmes which vary from job creation, loan, skill acquisition etc.

The study equally revealed that factors like lack of research, corruption, wrong policies, and failure to conduct or seek the opinion of the people, and planning/broadcast of local programmes without consultation with the local audience to whom the messages are meant for.

6. Conclusion

Rural radio is considered a very important aspect of community development. It helps to cater for the information need of rural people. Community or local media have significant role to play in rural development. Although like all other mass media, the basic or direct function of this

local radio is to provide the rural community information on various contemporary issues that is happening everyday around the community, country and beyond. It focuses on the programs that would be helpful to the rural and agriculturally based people. However, being the handful communication media being exist in the locality, it has divergent roles to play, ultimately contributing to social change and development of rural community.

7. Recommendations

To help combat rural poverty through community broadcasting, the following recommendations are made:

In combating rural poverty, there is need for popular participation and plurality in the ownership and access to the media. Religious institutions like churches, mosques and many others in the society should have access to the media so that they too can air their views about happenings in the society.

Local broadcasting stations should employ the use of mother tongue in broadcasting local programmes as majority of rural people are illiterates. More so, no matter the level of education, people always want to be addressed in their mother tongue. This will facilitate poverty alleviation programmes in the rural area. Apart from the mother tongue which is the local language, it will be more effective if the dialect of a particular community is used in communicating to them. This gives a sense of belonging and it increases participation of the audience.

From the findings, it is obvious that the use of rural broadcast to reduce poverty could be better if the people whom the programme is directed to participate in the programme from the conception to the execution of the programme. To achieve this, local broadcasting media must collaborate with the people in the communities. There is need for co-operation at its peak between the two parties. This concept could be referred to as participatory development, bottom-up, sustainable livelihoods or humble development approach.

Poverty alleviation programmes should be 'with the rural people' and not 'for the rural people'. Hence, committees for poverty alleviation programmes should not be dissolved immediately. Rather, there should be a forum created at the grass root to get the feedback/opinions from local inhabitants on the potency and benefits of particular programmes.

Similarly, researchers could also investigate how rural broadcasting can help in creating job opportunities which will reduce poverty. The increase in the number of unemployed ruralists is quite alarming. Therefore, the arm of government in-charge of poverty eradication can liaise with the village heads and traditional rulers in the creation of small-scale businesses instead of waiting for white collar jobs.

Finally, all the rural people who do not have a radio set are encouraged to own a radio set. This will facilitate the dissemination and reception of information at the community level.

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