



## News media as agent of dissemination of information for peoples-centred development in rural communities in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Information dissemination is important and crucial in ensuring a lot of involvement of people in rural areas for developmental activities. It helps to create the understanding that peoples-centred development, is a participatory process, in which the people themselves, have opportunities to participate in decision makings that affect their lives. Adult occupy a very important places in peoples-centred development processes. Their involvements in the process is important in sustaining the process. In this connection, a lot of efforts are required to mobilize them. One of the means by which this can be done, is through proper information dissemination. The thesis of this paper, is that, news media can serve as a veritable means of providing the needed public enlightenment that will promote the peoples-centred development process in the rural areas. In this regards, the authors examined the place of News Media in proper information dissemination. This discussion started with an x-ray of the concept of communication and that of News Media. It proceeded to examine the use of News Media in traditional African Society and climaxed the discussion with the impact News Media can have on rural life, in terms of promoting participatory sustainable development. The authors believe, that, if the capacity of available media and publicity outfits are strengthened and adequately utilized to the fullest, peoples-centred development processes can be promoted and sustained in our rural communities.

**Keywords:** Information dissemination, news media, rural development, participatory development, people-centred development, public enlightenment

### Introduction

The limitation of development strategies conceived during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, led to the emergence of a new vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which focus more on people's important development. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), according to Osuala (2015) <sup>[8]</sup>, took the first step in that direction, with its concept of sustainable peoples-centered development. The approach is a widely participatory process of social change, in which the people themselves are given the opportunity to take part in decision making that affects their lives (Okwudishu, 2018) <sup>[5]</sup>.

The adults who occupy a place of peoples-centred development, suffer a lot of illness and hardship, due to poverty and lack of education or knowledge. Hence, Osuala (2015) <sup>[8]</sup>, argued, that, no amount of investment will bring about lasting improvement in the living standards of the poor and marginalized people, unless they themselves change their attitudes and behavior. She argued further, that, there can be no change for the better without their informed participation. Therefore, a lot of efforts are required to adequately mobilize the people, through appropriate public enlightenment programme. A general mobilization cannot be successful without the use of the News Media. The Media is needed to establish a communication network for dissemination the information required to motivate; inform; influence; and, instruct the people or population on the need for full involvement in peoples-important development in the rural areas.

This paper examines news media as a means of disseminating information for promoting peoples'-centred development in rural communities. This paper begins by taking a cursory look at the meaning of communication and News Media, which is the bench mark for effective information dissemination. Thereafter, the paper examines

communication and information dissemination in traditional rural communities as instrument of social change and mobilization. The discussion is concluded with an x-ray of the various means of information dissemination; and, how the media can be employed in promoting development-oriented programmes, particularly in the rural areas.

### Conceptualizing Communication

The word "Communication", is a noun, with its verb "communicate". It means to share ideas. Hence, when people are in communication, they are associating, co-operating or joining an organization. The organization presents a structure, which we can describe as a set of rules. Therefore, communication means "sharing of elements of behavior or mode of life by the existence of sets of rules (Longe and Ofuani cited in Egebt 2022). When people are in communication, they are said to be of one mind or to understand one another. The essence of Communication is the achievement of oneness or unity or an "understanding", which is a prerequisite for sustainable peoples' development. There is no communication without a system of signs. Before the advent of the Whiteman, the traditional African Societies, Nigeria inclusive, has a structure which constituted the medium of disseminating information, and, it was an acceptable system of social interaction as well. Besides, it was used in the dissemination of information that can help to improve the wellbeing of the people. This system constituted the media employed for effective news mobilization. They were vital for mobilizing for strong national or local commitment to people development issues or popular participation in community affairs. Nevertheless, before looking at News Media in traditional African society, let us first examine the meaning of "News Media".

## **The Meaning of News Media**

News Media, simply means, “a means of reaching out to people in a given community”. The obvious strength of News Media is the fact, that, it reaches out to large audience or population at a given time. Onabajo in Aduwa and Isah (2015) <sup>[1, 6]</sup>, citing Moenuka, referred to News Media as having the function of informing and educating news audience with individual imbibing/accepting what is consistent with their belief and ways of perceiving the world among the constant barrage of information available to them. In the same vein, Ezenwilo (2020), viewed News media basically as having three principal function or roles it performs. Namely, they are:

To inform;

To educate; and,

To entertain.

This implies that media could be used for entertainment; for educating; and, provision of information. News media activities are educational when they deal with educational matters and also educative, when they are used as medium of instruction. We have the traditional and modern news media.

According to Onabajo cited in Aduwa and Isah (2015) <sup>[1, 6]</sup>, News Media can create new perspectives, which clear the ground for improved new skills and better education. It can also accelerate the social transformation required for socio-economic development, He further adds that, they can help in spreading and smoothing the arduous task of mobilizing the people’s resources responsible for the nation’s development efforts. In this regard, the information necessary to stimulate action towards change, is disseminated quickly and widest through the News Media. Let us now examine News Media in the traditional African settings.

## **News Media in Traditional African Society**

The use of News Media is not new in Africa. Since time immemorial, Africans have employed different means as medium communication and dissemination of information among its citizenry. News Media has been as a means of instructing and mobilizing the people for participation in various communal work initiated for promoting community development. Orobor (2008) <sup>[7]</sup>, reports, that, drumming for instance, was used to mobilize adults in various communities in Nigeria, especially in rural communal work. The message of the drums is loud; clear; exact; and, traditional.

Music was also greatly used in traditional rural communities as a medium of dissemination of information. Music is universal language and people of the world enjoy music. Music has been used to mobilize people for participation in various communal work. People listen to the lyrics of the music and consciously imbibe the message that is embedded and are gradually mobilized and encouraged to participate in the programme or act in line with the message or information disseminated. Message and ideas are put in local or national musical forms to offer great potentials for eliciting the support and participation of more people in national and local programmes.

Besides, festivals and ceremonies are used as medium of communication and dissemination of ideas. Every community has its festival ceremonies that are performed at specific times or period of the year. These types of festivals such as New Yam Festival, Age Grade initiation, often

attract sons and daughters at home and abroad, the rich and poor, low and high to come back home in order to participate and watch the activities. Due to cultural interest of the people in these ceremonies, they usually attract huge attendance. They therefore provide great opportunities to introduce desired changes or innovation, and provide adequate enlightenment that usually sensitize the people towards developing interest in participating in any community-based programme.

The use of the town crier was perhaps the commonest and most popularly means of dissemination of information in traditional African societies. The sound of the town crier often arouses suspicion and attention. Whenever there was any community activity or programme for which the people needed to participate, the town crier, was often used to inform the people. The town crier moves round the nook and crannies of the community announcing at every interval and spot the message and information to be given or disseminated. The people are expected to act immediately upon the receipt of such message. The message is often made effective, because at times, certain penalties are announced for any defaulter or anyone who fails to yield or carry out the instruction provided. In the same vein, people were mobilized for specific activities within the community by their local radio for the community. It was used to make all sorts of announcements and spread information among the populace and, it is still in used till date in most rural communities.

In modern African communities, other media for mass mobilization are there for information dissemination. These include, local newspapers, radio, television, newspaper, folk-tale, and role-playing. Newspapers, radio and television are specially used to draw attention and mobilize people for various developmental programmes.

In the rural areas, government have initiated a number of developmental programmes such as Better Life for Rural Women; the Family Support Programme; Poverty Alleviation Programme; Universal Basic Education Programme; Skill Development Programmes among a host of others. Government had relied on the News Media such as radio, television, newspapers as means of sensitizing the people particularly, the rural dwellers about these programmes. Many of these programmes have been translated into the local dialect of the people, and played in form of jingles and music on radio and television to stimulate peoples’ interest in them. In this way, the knowledge of the people, is broadened and a better understanding of the issue at stake is provided. The various organs of the news media, have become very vital to modern social process of rural communities in Nigeria.

Local newspaper is also becoming a very popular and widespread means of communication and information dissemination. The local or community newspaper, is usually published in the local dialect. In the western part of Nigeria, it is known as “IROYIN”. In the north, we have “GASKIYA TA FI KOBO”. The ABISHIR and ALFIJIR as local newspapers, have been used to entice many to wish to enroll in literacy programmes and to further their learning (Akanbi, 2011).

Local newspapers are produced or published quarterly, weekly or monthly. Local people use it to talk about topical issues that borders on the node of life of their people. The paper is used to educate on issues of land speculators, events such as stealing, bad habits, adulterous practices, violation

of customs and belief, and other issues that affect the lives of the people. Youths and members of the community are editors and makers of the local newspaper.

Besides, radio has been found to be a very useful instrument for transmitting programs to the masses of the people. The strength is boasted by the fact that many rural require any expertise to operate nor does one need to know, how to read and write to understand what is being transmitted or information being relayed as they are often transmitted in the local language or dialect of the people. Among the nomads, the transistor radio is their real companion. They stay in the bush for many days, and they rely on the radio particularly the transistorized radio, for news and information gathering. We also have the bush radio. Bush radios are mostly found in the university campuses. They are used for information dissemination within a wider environment. During the Nigeria and Biafra War of 1967 to 1970, the bush radio was popularly used by the then "Biafran" for propaganda to solicit for food, sympathy, and ammunitions from the advanced countries. Local radio is very powerful. Wherever they exist, they could be used to relay information and news to the people wherever they reside within the locality (Orobor, 2008) [7]. Local radio focuses on local issues for local consumption. People can develop local radio for dissemination of information among the people. They talk about new discoveries or happenings around the environment and outside the community at large. Such radios can penetrate the remotest areas of the community, where other media may not be easily accessible. Radio signal is not affected by the condition of the roads or the topology of a place. Therefore, whether in the valley; on the mountain or in the creeks, the radio receiver can receive messages meant for it. The transistorized radio set, does not worry about power failure from NEPA/EEDC or Power Holding Nigeria Limited. Radio message itself transcends state boundaries. The medium is accessible, because of the relative cheapness of the receiving set and of the range of the radio signal. The fact that no technical training is required to operate a radio receiver, also makes the medium more widely available.

Television is also used as a medium of dissemination of information, and to strengthen the process of social change in the rural areas. It has proved itself, as a very potent instrument for communication and dissemination of information among the people, television is used for public enlightenment mobilization. It is for popular participation and sustainability of people involvement and commitment to both national and local issues. Television like radio, can be tailored to suit and popularized a particular programme.

Drama is also used as a medium of instruction and dissemination of information. Drama is organized to depict certain behavior and practices that should be discontinued or abolished. Drama is usually organized around a particular theme. In the course of watching drama, people are made to imbibe the message and information being relayed.

Folktales and short stories were also a viable means of information dissemination in traditional African society. Folktales are often relayed by people usually elders or older siblings and relatives in order to drive home some messages into the people; and, promote certain practices or formation of a positive attitude towards something.

New dimension is also being added to the use of News Media as means of communication. Under the present dispensation, the various cellphones operators, have been

using their medium as means of disseminating vital information on issues like HIV/AIDS, the current transformation agenda, highlighting the need for full participation. It helps to mobilize the people for full participation in the programme. Their efforts have been quite complimentary in helping to spread and disseminate information among the people. The use of News Media has impacted greatly on the life of the people. This is the issues we must now turn our attention.

### **Impact of News Media on Rural Life**

More importantly, the News Media enable the people to receive vital information quickly. It has also helped to combat ignorance on the part of the people. Ignorance among the people, has been reduced drastically. People are now aware of most issues and happenings around them.

In addition, News Media has helped in promoting environmental sanitation practices. Through the messages and information passed on through the media, environmental awareness has been heightened and hazard reduced. Besides, it has brought about social consciousness. It has now given the people a sense of belonging and has reduce inclination of fatalism.

News Media has also helped to promote social cohesion and continuity as awareness about issues affecting the people is heightened. It has prepared the people for participation in the on-going debate on politics; economic; and, social reforms, land tenure system and a host of other issues. More importantly, it has made the people more open and receptive to changes.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

In this paper, an attempt has been made to highlight the role of News Media in the dissemination of information for peoples-centred development in rural communities in Nigeria, we have stressed the fact, that, the peoples-centred development, requires effective interaction and communication which will provide the platform for dissemination of appropriate information; instruction; education; and, enlightenment needed for popular participation and involvement of the populace. It has also been emphasized that the adult populace, which constitute important actors in the peoples-centred development are largely uneducated and so, need to be effectively mobilized through appropriate enlightenment; instruction; education by disseminating relevant information which will enable them to remain committed to national and local issues. The success of these efforts depends on the use of News Media, which has proved a very vital or potent instrument for effective information dissemination. We concluded the discussion with the highlight of the various media used in the traditional modern African communities for spreading information.

To utilize News Media to the fullest in promoting peoples-centred development, government at all levels and the people, must strive to strengthen the capacity of the available media and publicity outfits. Government must continue to adopt methods or media to which the people or the masses are used to, with which they are familiar and are therefore, culturally relevant,

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