

Impact of Itv Radio Rural Reporting in Fostering Community Engagement and Social Change in UDO Community, Edo State

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ABSTRACT

The study looked at the Impact of ITV radio Rural Reporting in Fostering Community Engagement and Social Change in Udo. The objectives of this study were to establish the extent to which Udo community residents are exposed to rural development reports on ITV radio, examine the influence of ITV radio rural development reports on Udo community, Edo State and find out the measures that can be adopted to enhance the influence of ITV radio rural development reports on Udo community. The development media theory was adopted in the study, survey served as research design while questionnaire was the instrument of gathering data. The study concluded that rural development reports of ITV radio has impacts on Udo residents. These include enlightening Udo residents on modern ways of farming, good health, investment in rural areas and discouraging rural-urban migration among other impacts. As a result of the study findings, the following recommendations are made rural development reports should be aired in Pidgin English and indigenous languages to enable everyone in the rural area understand the rural development messages, the timing and days of rural development reports should be extended and should not just be mere briefs but comprehensive reports and that notable rural dwellers such as chiefs, kings should always be invited to contribute on rural development programmes as such persons are highly influential and their presence and contributions would have more impacts on rural dwellers.

KEY WORDS: *Rural development, Radio, ITV, reporting, journalism.*

INTRODUCTION

Community journalism and rural reporting is a powerful and effective medium for widespread education in rural areas. Rural reporting can be used to bring about positive attitudinal change among the rural areas. It contributes toward the development of rural people by educating them about banking, child health and government policies among other issues. Ezaka(2017) avers that rural communication imparts knowledge of new technologies to rural dwellers, helps them improve their earnings and increase development. Access to accurate and timely information by rural dwellers can result in enhanced economic and social development (Ablu, 2002). The importance of rural reporting as a vehicle for bringing national development has been widely held among communication experts. This concern was given expression by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and World Bank report of 2004 recognising the importance of community media as tools for promotion of democratization and development (Buckley, 2005 cited in Christenson and Robinson, 2019). Motivated by this realization, several countries began experimenting the effect of rural radio in mobilizing their people to embrace government policies and programmes geared towards 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 and this has resulted in the alienation of the rural people in regards to government intervention programmes in time past and the present dispensation. The goal of community journalism and rural reporting communication is to motivate the people and secure participation in the development process. Because of being the most widespread and accessible of all the mass media, radio and television continue to be the most important media for communicating to the rural population in developing countries (Ojebode, 2001). The print media depend on literacy and are elite media with only fewer people having access to them. This result reinforces the importance of radio and television especially in the development of rural areas. Besides, radio and television have many advantages over other forms of communication. For instance, radio is mobile, affordable, immediate, can be powered by batteries in the absence of electricity, airs varieties of programmes, provides mechanisms (phone-in programmes) for feedback and television is audio-visual, can persuade through videos (Nwaoboli, 2023). When these unique qualities and comparative advantage are properly harnessed in community journalism and rural reporting, the media can be a major force in bringing about genuine and enduring development that will reflect in the quantitative and qualitative improvement in the lives of the people of Edo State.

Independent Television (ITV) Radio (92.3FM), Benin City, is a leading broadcasting station in Edo State, Nigeria, renowned for its commitment to promoting rural development through informative and engaging programming. As part of its social responsibility initiatives, ITV Radio has developed specialized programmes focused on rural development, targeting rural communities across the state. These programmes, aired in local languages such as Pidgin English and Bini, address critical issues like agriculture, health, education, and economic empowerment. Through leveraging its wide reach and audience engagement, ITV Radio's rural development programmes aim to educate, inform, and inspire rural communities, fostering social change and contributing to the sustainable development of Edo State.

Although community journalism and rural reporting play invaluable roles in rural development, the impact of such invaluable roles in Udo community are not fully understood. It is against this background that this study deems it fit to examine impact of ITV radio rural reporting on Udo Community, Edo State.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Media scholars, practitioners, development experts and policy makers such as Ibagere (2004) have in time past acknowledged the potentials of community journalism and rural reporting as major forces in bringing about political, socio-economic transformation, and all-round development of rural communities particularly in the less developed countries such as Nigeria. However, despite the fact that community journalism and rural reporting are becoming wide-spread in various developing countries like Nigeria, the challenges of rural reporting and inherent benefits of community reporting still lack sufficient research in Nigeria. Therefore, this study is an exploratory and investigative attempt to evaluate how much rural reporting has been able to contribute to the development of rural areas such as Udo Community, and how the role gaps can be covered despite all the attendant problems of rural reporting.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Establish the extent to which Udo community residents are exposed to rural development reports on ITV radio
2. Examine the influence of ITV radio rural development reports on Udo community, Benin City, Edo State
3. Find out the measures that can be adopted to enhance the influence of ITV radio rural development reports on Udo community

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Rural reporting

In the opinion of Okunna (2002), rural reporting implies communicating development messages. The author further defined rural reporting as the use of all forms of communication in reporting, publicizing and promotion of development at all levels of a society. In an attempt to give a vivid definition of the concept, Okunna(2002) cited Quebral (2010) who viewed it as the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people starting from rural areas. Asadu (2009) demonstrates that rural reporting can also be called communication for development, development journalism or communication for social change. He further explained that it simply means applying communication principles to development objectives of a society.

It is a multi-communication approach aimed at informing, empowering, educating and mobilizing or motivating the people to better lives in a sustainable way. At the community level, this type of development exposes experts and local technologies in the village. McLean, and Anderson (2009) further defined rural reporting as the use of communication processes, techniques and media to help people towards consensus, to help people plan actions for change and sustainable development, to help people acquire the knowledge and skills they need to improve their condition and that of society and to improve the effectiveness of institutions.

In rural reporting, the people are the propellers of their own development. It as well recognizes and respects the culture, attitude, intelligence and traditional wisdom of the people. Therefore, development that does not occur with the consent or involvement of the beneficiaries does not mean true development because people will not feel committed to the project. By 2003, there were 113-radio broadcasting stations in Nigeria, among these were 83 government-controlled and 30 commercial stations (Ablu, 2002). All the existing radio stations were located in the urban areas, which were either administrative capitals or commercial locations. Therefore the programmes of radio, catered for the tastes of the population in these areas for instance government agencies, elites etc. In addition, this makes rural reporting process unsuccessful when compared with that of other countries in terms of the level of development in those countries.

According to Ekwelie (1999) as quoted by Okunna (2002), a remarkable feature of rural reporting is that it is only concerned with people's welfare as defined by them. The broadcasting environment as defined in policy, legislation and regulation was also unfavourable. The existing National Mass Communication Policy is also unfavourable. Taken together, both the 1990 policy and the 1992

Act, while representing an expansion in access, nevertheless, deny access to the majority of Nigerians especially those in the rural areas of the country. This development again fails to honour Nigeria's responsiveness to existing global standards regarding broadcasting. As regards to the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) debates of 1970s and 1980s, development scholars and experts are today still worried that instead of pitching development stories, the modern mass media especially radio are dousing the public with too much entertainment, sex, fashion, food, celebrity stories, travel and sensationalism (Uche, 2009).

Development Journalism

Development journalism is the type of journalism which pays attention to the coverage of ideas, policies, programmes, activities and events dealing with the improvement of lives of the rural people (Emenyeon, 2005). The term development journalism was first coined in the 1960's at the Press Foundation of Asia. Two Philippine journalists, Alal Chalkley and Juan Mercado had a concern about how news organizations covered socio-economic developments in a superficial way, while journalists reported government press releases leaving little space for analysis or evaluation of development projects. Today, development journalism looks at conditions in developing states and how to improve them. It exposes poverty worldwide and helps to research the causes, consequences and how to address poverty in developing nations (Asemah-Ibrahim, Nwaoboli&Asemah, 2022a, 2022b). Accordingly, it is the journalists' duty to critically examine and evaluate the relevance of a development project to national and local needs, the difference between a planned scheme and its actual implementation, and the difference between its impact on people as claimed by government officials and as it is actually. The reporting on national and international events is only desirable if they constructively contribute to the development and improvement of the living standard (Ojebode, 2001).

Development news should refer to the needs of people, which may vary from country to country or from region to region, but generally include primary needs, such as food, housing, employment; secondary needs such as transportation, energy sources and electricity; Tertiary needs such as cultural diversity, recognition and dignity.

Development journalism can be divided into two types of journalism where the first new school started appearing in the 1960's, this school of thought is similar to investigative reporting which focuses on the conditions in the developing world and how to improve them. The second one involves heavy influence from the government of the country involved. This can be a very powerful tool for local education and empowerment however it can also be a powerful means of suppressing information and restricting journalists (Quebral, 2010).

LITERATURE REVIEW

News Values of Community Journalism and Rural Reporting

Community journalism and rural reporting contains certain news values. These include:

- a. **Development:** Journalism can be used in two different ways to enable the audience prosper, one is by articulating government projects to serve the development goals of the government while the other is by playing the investigative role that brings useful information to the knowledge of the audience when they point out what the government is supposed to do for them and is not being done

(Quebral, 2010). Community journalists should report in terms of positive programmes through success stories and advocacy.

b. Social responsibility: Journalists reporting about rural areas need to focus on ordinary (rural) people because, it is these common people that bear the brunt of the impact of government decisions and suffer most from deprivation arising from public expenditure priorities, they also make up the largest sector of the population.

c. Education: This is where the development journalist makes the audience understand how they will benefit from the adoption or use of a certain project.

d. National integration: Nwankwo (2013) notes that the pillars of community journalism are nation-building, creation of national consciousness, unity and encourage togetherness; this creates a peaceful co-existence between diverse and sometimes hostile communities.

e. Human Interest: rural community stories need not be lifeless and predictable, the journalists can give these stories impact by putting people in them because in the end, development is about changing lives and that's what listeners relate to.

PROBLEMS OF RURAL REPORTING IN NIGERIA

Journalists in Nigeria who attempt to serve the needs of the country's predominantly rural population have one of the most difficult jobs in mass communication and this is a conclusion reached by many media men who must deal concretely and systematically with the problems associated with a rural target audience (Uche, 2009). It takes patience and dedication to operate any medium which has, for one of its major components, reaching a rural audience. It is easy to become discouraged because feedback is frequently inadequate from listeners, and frequently, there is little money to make improvements which are obvious to the journalist (Onalaja, 2024).

One of the greatest problems facing media houses that delve into rural information reporting is obsolete and poorly operating equipment. Frequently, too, there is an almost complete lack of necessary recording equipment, good microphones, etc. In many rural areas there is no electricity or power supply, and even in those rural areas where they exist, their steady supply is not assured or guaranteed (Miller and Hatamian, 2011).

Another problem is lack of responsible employees who run equipment or act as its custodians. In most cases, those in radio and television in Nigeria have had to learn on the job. Moreover, Nigerian journalists who venture into the area of rural information reporting, particularly those working with government owned media houses, are in a difficult situation where political leadership demands run counter to good journalism, reflected in dissemination of accurate information and fairness in setting the news agenda. Other challenges include bureaucratic redtapism, laws governing state secrets, job dissatisfaction (Oseji, 2016).

Nwosu (1987) cited in Okeh (2010) identifies inadequate training and inadequate research as two factors which constitute a cog in the wheel of the effective utilization of the mass media in rural information system and posits that these problems have to be eliminated before people can fully realize the rich potential of mass media and significant role it can play in effective rural information dissemination.

REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Nwankwo (2013) examined the Role of Mass Media in Rural Information System in Nigeria. No theory was adopted for the research and the library research method was adopted for the study. The research discovered that the only thing that constitute news for reporters about the rural area is when negative things happen in the rural areas such as a ritual sacrifice, community clashes, rape, murder, etc. It added that the press hardly reports any good news about the rural communities in Nigeria such as when there is peace, harmony and self-efforts at rural development undertaken by rural community leaders. Consequently, rural poverty keeps increasing unabated and the Nigerian press reporters have not effectively exposed the deplorable conditions under which the rural dwellers live in. The study also observed that bias of the reporters is in favour of the urban dwellers who are adjudged to be learned, enlightened and understand the meaning and importance of news argue that if the news reported upon is not essentially urban oriented, the patronage especially in the print-media would be very low. The study recommended that the trend should be reversed and that the news reporters in Nigeria should show more patriotism in the coverage of events in the rural areas as this is the only way government could know and understand the plights of the rural dwellers for effective public policy-making to reduce the present level of rural poverty and reverse the current rise in rural-urban migration in the country.

Ablu (2002) examined Integrated rural development administration lessons from two experiments in northern Nigeria. The objective of the study was to holistically look at community media and new media technologies with particular emphasis on Nigeria. The discourse which specifically paid attention on community radio sought its marriage with new media technologies with a view to bringing development to information ex-communicated communities. It found that community Media is community owned, peoples' oriented and less profit driven. It has the capacity to facilitate and smoothen effective communication in places where the presence of Mass Media is not well felt thus fostering development in other media marginalized communities. Through community Media, crimes at grassroot level can be prevented while civil education, cross-gender dialogue, cultural literacy among other things can be harnessed for developmental purposes. This discourse established the fact that community media, especially community radio, has become a child of necessity for rural development in Nigeria. The paper concluded that this initiative can only be achieved in this digital age if there is an excellent marriage between community media and new media technologies in the country. It recommended a highly hybrised and integrated media approach among other things in community reporting and journalism.

Riaz (2015) examined the "Challenges to Rural Journalism in Pakistan". The objective was to provide an insight into the condition of the rural journalism in Pakistan. The study was based on a survey of a sample of 500 rural journalists working nation-wide in the nooks and corners of the country. It was found that the national mainstream newspapers do not give proper coverage to the issues and problems of the rural areas. The urban based mainstream newspapers and television channels give coverage to urban issues because of the market trend and the financial priorities. It may lead to the phenomenon of communication imbalance and the feelings of deprivation among the rural communities. It found that people living in the rural areas of the country are playing a vital role in the national development but they are facing the feelings of deprivation and isolation. It added that the local and regional media are passing through a great crisis while the rural journalists

and correspondents are neither facilitated by the government nor supported by their media organizations. The study recommended that the media organizations should eradicate the division of rural and urban and they should give a reasonable coverage to the issues and problems of the rural communities.

The studies were related to this study in that they all discussed about community journalism and rural reporting, however, unlike this study that focused on impact of ITV radio rural reporting on Udo Community, Edo State, the other studies focused on other scope aside the study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Development Media Theory

This theory according to Mcquail (2007) cited in Mattelart&Mattelart (2007) emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. The theory recognizes the peculiar problems faced by third world countries in Africa and Asia; problems such as illiteracy, tribal and religious loyalties etc. The theory assumes that the media is a powerful tool or vehicle for which national development can be attained. The theory seeks to explain how the press in developing nations like Nigeria operates (Omoera, Nwaoboli&Osapkplor, 2024). It takes account of the fluctuating economic and political conditions. According to the proponents of this theory, the press in such developing countries should highlight efforts at national development, speed transformation of society, economic and social equality, mobilizing the people for economic, social and political development and improvements in living standards.

Similarly, the development media theory was intended to recognize the fact that societies undergoing a transition from underdevelopment and colonialism to independence and better material conditions often lack the infrastructure, the money, the traditions, the professional skills and even the audiences needed to sustain media institutions comparable to those of the First World or Second World (Oseji, 2016).

This theory is usually couched in development communication which consists of information about government plans and efforts to improve the standard of living of the populace. It appeals to citizens to adopt new ideas and ways of doing things; news of struggles for a better living and news of achievements to spur or inspire the citizenry, appeals from government to citizens for co-operation and threats of force or punishment in the event of non-compliance (Okunna, 2002). The theory emphasizes the following goals:

1. The primacy of the national development task such as curbing crimes
2. The pursuit of cultural and informational autonomy
3. Support for democracy
4. Solidarity with other developing countries.

This theory is relevant to this study because it advocate media support for an existing political regime and its efforts of bringing about national, economic, religious and social development. By reporting crime stories and its consequences, media aid society at large. The theory also argues that unless a nation is well-established and its economic development well underway, media must be supportive of government through various measures that would enhance development in the country.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study utilized the survey research design with questionnaire as instrument of data collection as it seeks to find out the opinion of stakeholders on the discourse at hand. The population of the study was the total number of residents in Udo Community, Benin City, Edo State which according to the 2006 National Population Census as cited by Udeme (2017) is 3, 412. The sample size for this study was 100 and this was determined using Taro Yamane sampling size with a margin error of 0.10. The sampling technique adopted was random sampling technique. After the distribution of copies of questionnaire, all were retrieved and found usable.

Data Presentation

Table 1: Extent of exposure to rural development reports on ITV

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	36	36
Once a week	1	1
Twice a week	35	35
Three times a week	22	22
Weekends	6	6
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 1 showed that the extent of exposure to rural development reports on ITV by Udo community residents is high. This is evident based on the fact that the number of those exposed to the reports daily, twice and thrice a week is high.

Table 2: Influence of ITV radio rural development reports in fostering community engagement and social change in Udo community

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Has enlightened me on modern ways of farming	13	13
Enhance your knowledge of ways to have good health	24	24
Encourages investments in rural areas	43	43
Discourages rural-urban migration	20	20
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 2 showed that rural development reports of ITV has enlightened Udo residents on modern ways of farming, good health, investment in rural areas and discourages rural-urban migration.

Table 3: Measures ITV radio can utilise in fostering community engagement and social change in Udo

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Reporting rural development messages in Pidgin English Language	30	30
Extending the timing/space allocated to rural development messages	19	19
Frequently reporting more rural development messages	9	9
Reporting rural development messages in Bini language	9	9
Mobilizing and sensitizing the masses for rural development	14	14
Educating the masses on the need for rural development	19	19
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 3 showed that the possible ways of improving ITV rural development programmes is to report the programmes in Pidgin English Language, extend the timing of the reports and educate the masses on the need for rural development.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study's findings indicate a high level of exposure to ITV radio rural development reports among Udo community residents. A significant proportion of respondents (36%) reported daily exposure, while 35% and 22% reported exposure twice and thrice a week, respectively. This frequent exposure suggests that ITV radio is an effective channel for disseminating information on rural development to the community. The findings also reveal that the reports have had a positive impact on community members' knowledge and awareness of essential issues. For instance, 43% of respondents credited the reports with encouraging investments in rural areas, while 24% reported improved knowledge of good health practices.

The data further suggests that ITV radio rural development reports have contributed to fostering community engagement and social change in Udo community. The reports have enlightened residents on modern farming practices (13%), discouraged rural-urban migration (20%), and promoted investment in rural areas. These outcomes indicate that ITV radio is playing a vital role in promoting rural development and community engagement. The high exposure rates and positive impacts observed in this study show the importance of radio as a medium for rural development communication. The findings provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of ITV radio rural reporting in Udo community, highlighting its potential as a catalyst for social change and community development.

Little wonder, Nwankwo's (2013) study recommended that news reporters in Nigeria should show more patriotism in the coverage of events in the rural areas as this is the only way government could know and understand the plights of the rural dwellers for effective public policy-making to reduce the present level of rural poverty and reverse the current rise in rural-urban migration in the country.

Ate (2012) added that with community media, crimes at grassroot level can be prevented while civil education, cross-gender dialogue, cultural literacy among other things can be harnessed for developmental purposes. Findings from the study also suggest that rural development programmes on ITV radio impact on Udo community in terms of developing the community.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has looked at the impact of ITV radio rural reporting in development of Udo Community. The study concludes, based on the findings, that rural development reports of ITV radio has impacts on Udo residents. These include enlightening Udo residents on modern ways of farming, good health, investment in rural areas and discouraging rural-urban migration among other impacts. As a result of the study findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Rural development reports should be aired in Pidgin English and indigenous languages to enable everyone in the rural area understand the rural development messages.
2. The timing and days of rural development reports should be extended and should not just be mere briefs but comprehensive reports
3. Notable rural dwellers such as chiefs, kings should always be invited to contribute on rural development programmes as such persons are highly influential and their presence and contributions would have more impacts on rural dwellers.

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