

Community Radio as a Dependable Pathway to Achieving Sustainable Food Security in Nigeria: A Development Communication Discourse

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Abstract

Effective communication is essential for mass mobilization for food security goals achievement in Nigeria. For any development programme or task to be accomplished in the community, there must be a conscious and effective use of existing resources of the mass media. The fact that the whole world, including Nigeria is facing the hydra-headed phenomenon known as economic meltdown cannot be overemphasized. One sure way of mitigating this rising phenomenon is to ensure sustainable food security in the nation by laying emphasis on the development of agriculture and agro-allied sectors. The study seeks to drive the need for community radio initiatives that explore sensitization and enlighten programmes on issues that are geared towards mobilizing the citizenry for food security. Historical and library research methods were employed for analysis in this study. The study submits that there is a significant relationship between food security and media in development, should community radio be given serious attention.

Keywords: Community radio, community mobilization, food security, media for development, sustainable development

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Introduction

Communication is no doubt necessary for development. This simply implies that communication and development are inseparable phenomena; and as such, there can be no development without communication. Hence, development messages can, indeed, be communicated. To effectively communicate development messages, therefore, would involve the systematic utilisation of appropriate communication channels and techniques (Coldevin, 1987), not only in helping to improve the living condition of the people, especially the marginalized group, but also in increasing their participation in the development process. As a medium of mass communication, radio has gone a long way in promoting unity and enhancing relevant developments in the society. Thus, its importance to people and the nation as a whole can be seen in its nature, mode of message delivery and its impact on the audience/public. Radio is one of the mass media of communication which disseminates information to large audience at different geographical locations whose members are not united and cannot be controlled. Nevertheless, mass communication, especially radio broadcasting, enables the audience to receive and react to messages simultaneously. Radio has been used and is still being used to sensitize and enlighten rural and urban dwellers on crucial issues which culminate in mobilizing the citizenry for action and development. Since the community refers to all people who live in a particular area: village, town, city or country; it follows that if the people are informed, educated and empowered with adequate knowledge of events, situations and circumstances, they would be motivated into taking appropriate actions that would solve certain problems and improve their entire living condition. In this way mass communication, especially through radio, promotes and enhances community development. The ultimate goal of any community is to develop; that is why in the early days, communities or local groups embarked on different projects like construction of foot-paths, craft-bridges across rivers, village squares, village halls, market arenas and shades, among others. Since Western education was virtually absent in those days, development projects were centered on the traditions or culture of the community. Hence, there were no need for major projects like schools, hospitals, and motorable roads, which communities were apparently ignorant of. In contrast, nowadays, communities are exposed to varied influences within and outside their boundaries, through the mass media of communication. These influences have led to the quest for development strategies in a comprehensive scale (Okunna, 2004). Aided by the influences of the mass media, particularly the radio, government activities have been extended to all areas. Thus, there is greater interaction between communities, leading to socio-economic and political changes in various communities. These changes have had direct bearing on both the extent and pattern of development projects such as schools, hospitals, pipe-born water and electricity supply, mechanized farms, tarred roads and concrete bridges, transportation and telecommunication network services, etc. Consequent upon these influences and changes engendered by the advancement of technology and transformation of the mass media of communication, the need to achieve food self-sufficiency too, requires effective mobilization strategies, which would enable farmers to improve on their agricultural practices.

Targeted radio initiatives can address nutritional deficiencies and other associated concerns through radio programmes designed to educate farmers on agricultural issues. The paper, therefore, seeks to drive the need for community radio initiatives that explore sensitization and enlightenment programmes on issues that are geared towards mobilizing the citizenry for food security in the overall gamut of development.

Statement of the Problem

It is even more obvious now that for any development programme or task to be accomplished in the community, there must be a conscious and effective use of all existing resources of the mass media, as well as the traditional methods of mass communication. Despite government effort in reaching out and extending administrative dividends to the citizens, basic education still eludes most of our rural communities due to poor coverage and dissemination of information. Every government has as one of its basic policy thrusts, the need to achieve food self-sufficiency. This requires effective mobilization strategies which would ensure that the citizens who are beneficiaries of the policies would contribute their quota in the implementation. The success of development policies, programmes and projects is largely determined by the ability to mobilize the support of the masses for such programmes, policies or projects (Nwabueze, 2007); hence, the need for a community radio campaigns for food security. More so, the use of community radio to further community development in many parts of the world cannot be overemphasized. This development is reputed to have evolved as an alternative to the limitations of mainstream broadcast media, especially the predominantly commercial oriented radio broadcasting networks, in meeting the development need of the people.

The paper is discussed under the following sub-headings:

- i. Theoretical framework
- ii. Radio as a Powerful Tool for Mass Communication, Community Enlightenment and Mobilization
- iii. Food security situation in Nigeria
- iv. Achieving food security goals through radio programmes

Theoretical Framework

The study finds its theoretical basis on the Development Media, Agenda-setting and Diffusion of Innovation theories. The Development Media Theory, which was propounded in 1987 by Dennis McQuail prescribes positive use of the media in national development, and such as favours democratic and grassroots involvement in national development goals. The theory postulates that the “media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy” (McQuail, 1987, p.121). The implication of the foregoing is that the mass media would have the responsibility and freedom to gather and disseminate information to satisfy, among others, the development needs of the society, food security inclusive. On the basis of the Agenda-setting theory, McCombs & Shaw cited in Griffin (1991) explain that the,

mass media have ability to transfer the salience of items on their news agenda to the public agenda. We judge as important what the media judge as important. Media coverage of issues confers importance on them and helps the audience to treat certain issues as also being more important than others. They consequently influence the attitudes or decisions of the audience towards the subjects on the agenda. (p.332)

The setting of agenda by the media implies that people look up to the media for cues to issues of salience. Dominic (1993, p.525), in reinforcing the above view asserts that the “media often choose and emphasize certain topics, thereby causing the public to also choose and emphasize those issues”. Corroborating the above statement, McQuail & Windahl (1981, p.62) aver that “audience not only learn about public issues and other matters through the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the mass media place upon it.” The basic idea being pushed here is that amongst a given range of issues or topics, those which get more media attention will grow in their familiarity and perceived importance over time, and those which get less will decline correspondingly. Also part of the agenda-setting function is the diffusion of innovations. On the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, F. M. Rogers (1983) cited by Perry (2002, p. 177) discloses that diffusion refers to a “process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of social system”; and stresses that an innovation “is an idea, practice or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption”. Rogers & Shoemaker, cited by McQuail & Windahl (1981, p.52) identify four distinct steps in an “innovation diffusion” process. These include:

- **Knowledge**
The individuals are exposed to awareness of the existence of the innovation and gain some understanding of how it functions.
- **Persuasion**
The individual forms a favourable or unfavourable attitude towards the innovation.

- **Decision**
The individual engages in activities which lead to a choice to adopt or reject the innovation.
- **Confirmation**
The individual seeks reinforcement of the innovation decision if exposed to conflicting messages about the innovation.

Unarguably, from the postulations of these theories and their implications for the mass media's relationship with information dissemination and sensitization in mobilizing the citizenry towards a better life, it is only obvious that the acquisition of development knowledge and adoption of new technologies or inputs aimed at food security would be enhanced with the help of community radio programmes.

Radio as a Powerful Tool for Mass Communication, Community Enlightenment and Mobilization

Radio is reputed to be the first truly mass medium of communication in reaching mass audience instantly wherever they are and in altering social attitudes, family relationships as well as how people relate to their environment. It is no doubt a popular medium among the various mass communication media as made possible by its special characteristics. By nature, the broadcast message of the radio is audio and intangible; hence, its signals are delivered via a receiver wherever the listener may be located. The implication is that there is no limitation for listeners in terms of location; thus, one can access messages whether on the farm, in the boat at sea, in an airplane, in the office at work or in the bedroom at home. The government, cognizant of radio set as powered by dry-cell batteries as a rural dweller's companion, uses it therefore to promote public enlightenment programmes on crucial matters such as: food security, health, family planning and how to improve the people's general condition of life. The use of vernacular by broadcast media makes the people readily believe and trust the radio information as true, dependable and reliable. Food security programmes on radio can get to rural dwellers if initiated. More so, with the use of vernacular the problem of reaching a majority of listeners in rural communities, who are illiterate, poor and ignorant of the development plans and policies of government, will be solved. Besides, as radio allows the people to participate in the production of programmes, it gives them a sense of belonging. With this, radio programme tailored towards food security issues would be perceived well, as the radio would be seen as instrument for communication, sensitization and mobilization of entire people for participation in development talks, plans and projects. The fact that radio is more common, accessible, cheap, and has the widest ability to reach the remotest part of the country or the world at large cannot be overemphasized; it serves as the fastest medium for mass communication. Therefore, the paper affirms the view of Obidike (1986) who maintains that community development cannot be achieved without the involvement of the people in making and implementing policies that affect them; and this can only be done through effective use of mass media of communication, especially the radio. Attesting to this fact, Ahmed (1982) opines that community development can only be achieved by involving the people in the process, not as spectators but as active and decisive participants. Here, radio can provide a participatory communication channel in supporting agricultural efforts by using local languages to communicate directly with farmers and listeners' groups (Al-hassanet *al.*, 2011). A participatory radio campaign with community radio stations designed to educate farmers, and enable them to improve their agricultural practices will no doubt enhance food security; as it does not basically require of them the ability to read or write, but makes their participation (as listeners) in the communication process easier by the use of indigenous language. The use of GSM phone would also be a further interactive means of enhancing the programme and simplifying the process whereby listeners would contribute and express their reactions, wishes, opinions, views and ideas on food security issues being transmitted. More so, since the transmission is immediate and direct through the radio, the hassles of complicated production process, as obtains in newspaper for instance, would be eliminated.

Food Security Situation in Nigeria

Food is life; hence, food has become an instrument of national power (Ojo & Adebayo, 2012). Theones (2004) opines that households are food secure when they have access to the quantity and variety of foods their members need to maintain active and healthy lives. However, poverty is a major factor that affects access to sufficient food in Nigeria. This has led to household food insecurity where households are unable to obtain adequate food either through home production or food purchases. The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) (2001) reports that poverty encompasses different dimensions of deprivation that relate to human capabilities, including consumption and food security. A National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) report shows that about 40 percent of Nigerians live below absolute poverty line (Aljazeera, 2020). Also, data on "food share" analysis suggest that most Nigerian households spend more than 75 percent of their income on food alone, a clear indication of food insecurity in the nation (Ogbonna, 2005). Similarly, Nwabueze (2005) observes that food insecurity in any nation will not only slow down the nation's development, but will clearly disrupt a carefully planned national development programme. Still on the worrisome food security situation in Nigeria, research shows that households do not have access to food sufficient for a healthy living. Agbola, Ikpi & Kormawa (2004) studied the nature of food insecurity among rural farming households in Osun State and discovered that 61% of the households were

face with food insecurity. Similarly, Olayemi (1998) has noted that 41% of the Nigerian population is food insecure with 16% being severely undernourished. In the light of the above, any system where food demand is not sufficiently met is simply one with looming food crisis. In their overview of the food security situation in Nigeria, Ojo & Adebayo (2012) noted that despite pretensions to the contrary, Nigeria is still far from being completely food secured. The UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, during his three day summit on world food security in Rome, according to a CNN (2009) report, noted that more than one billion people are hungry. He told the assembled leaders that six million children die of hunger every year, and 17,000 every day. While emphasizing on the critical nature of the situation, Ban Ki-moon revealed that in 2050, the world will need to feed two billion more mouths – 9.1 billion in all. It is in view of the foregoing that attainment of food security is imperative in Nigeria; hence, the need for community radio campaign on food security. Despite enormous materials and human resources available in Nigeria, the nation still remains one of the poorest in the world with 70 percent of its people living on less than one dollar a day and about 90 percent of the population living on less than two dollars a day (Nwabueze, 2007). This only points to the fact that food insecurity stares the nation in the face. Agriculture, which is crucial to the assurance of food security, is apparently relegated to the background, with oil receiving priority attention. A World Economic Forum (2016) report says that Nigeria spends over half of household income on food, which only indicates the nation's vulnerability to food insecurity and further buttresses the fact that the growing food insecurity is a potent threat for many countries in Africa, including Nigeria.

Achieving Food Security Goals through Community Radio Programmes

As radio continues to evolve in the digital age, it remains the medium that reaches the widest audience world-wide. Food security requires a community radio that aims at creating a compelling programming that will get at the root. Given the fact that radio continues to be the most readily accessible communication tool, community radio programme can be developed in a way to use interactive radio as one medium through which information regarding food security is shared. Interactive radio programme has a way of impacting knowledge to the audience. It could be referred to as education, training obtained or learning through the radio, with a view to improving knowledge or developing skills. It entails the dissemination of messages through radio to a heterogeneous audience with the purpose of enlightening them or developing/improving their knowledge on agricultural skills that will improve food security. The greatest challenge facing the world today is how to harness available resources to maximize human potentialities and bridge the gap created by the uneven rates of development in various parts of the world. For this development disparity, UNESCO recognizes the role of radio as a means of communicating rural development information to the rural people. Claude Ondobo, UNESCO Deputy Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information and Director of Communication Development Division, notes that:

community radio catalyzes the development efforts of rural folk ... given its exceptional ability to share timely and relevant information on development issues, opportunities, experiences, life skills and public interests" (UNESCO, 2001, p. iii).

Community radio for food security is a timely call for farm forums on a massive scale in many regions of Nigeria. Poverty is perhaps an inevitable part of the social reality of the rural areas. One of the appropriate remedial measures that may help ameliorate the ills of poverty is community radio programmes that will sensitize the rural population on the need for food security, as well as showcase skills and awareness on how farming should be done. If the rural areas must develop, it is only imperative that their greatest resource, agriculture, must be maximized. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that community radio should play an important role in this development process. The reason for this assumption is simple: nothing thrives without information, least of all food security. It is this information angle that community radio can effectively provide. The community radio option as advocated by this paper is, therefore, a significant pointer to the need for adjustment/modification in the inherent loopholes associated with previous paradigms of media and development relationship. Modification here has to do with the effective use of community radio as a pathway to achieving food security; and entails participatory programmes design geared towards educating farmers to enable them to improve their agricultural practices. This is because radio has been identified as powerful medium for participatory communication as well as a relevant tool in both economic and social development. This is in line with Roger and Burdge's (1972) development advocacy:

Development is a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced to a social system in order to produce higher per-capita incomes and levels of living through some modern production methods and improved social organization. Development corresponds to modernization of an individual. (p.14)

The implication of the foregoing, therefore, is that if we can think of the possibility of enhancing agriculture, then there is definitely a role for broadcasting; and such that would also be quite advantageous to rural development for what agriculture particularly portends for it. In reinforcing the use of broadcasting and other mass media to support agriculture, Hornik (1988) hints of how radio, for instance, has been effectively used to advise the farming populace of new government policies and to encourage discussion, feedback, and eventual support for new agricultural measures; since knowledge and information are absolutely very integral factors for accelerating

agricultural development through increased production. Chapman *et al.* (2003) also affirmed radio's effectiveness in improving the sharing of agricultural information by remote rural farming communities. In the light of the above, the drive for community radio as a pathway for achieving food security is not just looking at food in terms of agriculture from the perspective of subsistence farming, but rather in terms of commercial agricultural production. This is to see food security in terms of large-scale business for agriculture, and implies the production of food with the motive of contributing to the nation's gross national product. Construed from the foregoing perspective, it is easy to see that the creation of community radio in particular has a great role to play at the grass roots level for rural development; as programming could transcend issues that pertain to poverty and agriculture to gender inequality and education among other social concerns. This role, when viewed holistically, finds its fullest articulation in the development theory of the media as embedded on the need to use communication to achieve social change and better life in the society; since the theory considers media messages as something that can be consciously designed to enable people acquire the needed skills to transform their society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Research has no doubt established the worrisome state of food security in Nigeria, in which many households do not have access to food sufficient for a healthy living. Agriculture certainly creates the base for food security in any society, while food security in turn is very essential for its sustainable development. For any development task to be accomplished in any community there must be a conscious and effective use of existing resources of the mass media to catalyze it. One sure way of ensuring food security in any society and nation, therefore, is to lay emphasis on the development of agricultural and agro-allied sectors. Since agriculture remains perhaps the only sustainable approach to rural development, it would serve Nigeria's policy makers well if community radio should be given serious attention; more so, since communication and development have proven to be absolutely inseparable phenomena. It is on the strength of the foregoing that the study has clearly highlighted the imperative for effective communication as very essential for mass mobilization for food security goals achievement in Nigeria; and thus reinforced the significant relationship between food security and media in development. Hence, based on the foregoing discussion, analysis and conclusion, the study recommends as follows:

- i. There is need for comprehensive and appropriate national development media policy with a new concept of rural development.
- ii. Poverty and unemployment are among basic reasons for lack of access to food. Hence, entrepreneurship development programmes in broadcast media and such other economic empowerment programmes that encourage business ventures that work against the state of poverty in any society should be emphasized.
- iii. Programmes which encourage basic skills in agriculture and agro-allied business ventures in local and foreign languages should be encouraged.

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