

MEDIA AND DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION, CATALYSTS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN Port Harcourt CITY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

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Abstract

The crux of the study is to investigate media and development communication as catalysts for development in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area. Three objectives were formulated to guide the study and development theory was used to anchor the research. Survey research method was used with a projected population of 1148665, and sample size of 200. The study found out that television has created more awareness for government development projects in comparison to radios, newspapers, and the Internet. The study established that respondents were well aware of government projects and programmes due to the media and the study also found out that majority of respondents attach as much importance to development projects as attached to such projects by the media – through coverage and reporting, However, radio stations in Port Harcourt need to do better in keeping the public up to date on government development projects. The media must equip the public with not just average information, but adequate information on basic rights and entitlements, public services, public budgets, health, housing projects and road rehabilitation projects; education and working opportunities, agricultural prices and other market information.

Key Words: Media, Development Communication and Development

Introduction

Nigeria is a country that is blessed with both human and natural resources, but the challenge bedeviling the country is as a result of poor management of its natural resources by the ruling class. It is unfortunate that the resources instead of being a blessing to the nation, have become a curse. A country that is supposed to be one of the wealthiest in the world has become one of the world's poorest. This can be attributed to high level corruption that has permeated into the fabric of the country's national life. There is no sector into which corruption has not eaten deep. From the public sector to the Private sector, traces of the scourge are visible. In 2018 a report by the Brookings Institution placed Nigeria as the world's poverty capital knocking off India from that position.

Poor planning, articulation and execution of development programmes and projects and is also part of the problems in Nigeria. The government wakes up and without the knowledge of the people cite projects that have little or no bearing on the lives of the citizens, thereby undermining the essence of development communication. Community access and participation are considered cardinal and significant components to the successes of development interventions. The lack of beneficiary communities' participation in the conception, design, implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation of projects is often blamed for the failure of many development interventions (Leeuwis, 2004; Taylor, 1994; Cherdpong & Flor, 2014).

Development communication is defined by World Bank as the "integration of strategic communication in development projects" based on a clear understanding of indigenous realities ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Development communication](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_communication)). Strategic communication is a powerful tool that can improve the chances of success of development projects. Strategic communication, according to Murphy (2008 p.3) "is simply a way to affect perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of key audiences in support of objectives.

The World Bank defines participation as “a process, through which stake-holders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them” (World Bank, 1996). UNESCO’s conception of participation gives a sense of equity and sustainability. This is to say that community members are in a well-informed position to influence decisions that have an impact on their lives and to also exercise control and ownership in development interventions so as to ensure project sustainability.

Participatory communication is defined as “that type of communication in which all the interlocutors are free and have equal access to the means to express their viewpoints, feelings and experiences” (Bordenave, 1994: 43). This reinforces the view that ordinary people have long years of experience which, if utilized, can bring about meaningful development to them (Freire, 1983). Therefore, providing opportunities for ordinary people to participate in decision-making enables them to express their knowledge about how they view the world and interpret development. “Rather than view themselves as somehow deficient or lacking in their ability to effect social change, communities could, through participatory methods, reassert and reclaim their capacity to transform their daily lives” (Howley, 2010: 184).

The media have certain unique qualities that make different governments in the world to want to oversee their operations. The media do not only break the distance barrier, that is, their messages reach audiences immediately; they equally break the illiteracy barrier thereby making everyone who understands the language in which a programme is broadcast to participate in it. What this means is that the broadcast media can be used as a tool to galvanize people into immediate action. Governments across the globe are very wary of this ‘special’ quality of the broadcast medium. This explains the reason

different governments are interested in the management of the broadcast media where radio is a family member.

The distinguished pioneering scholarship of Professor Nora Cruz Quebral gave birth to the concept of development communication in 1971. Therefore, the concept of participatory development communication is closely associated with the College of Development Communication University of the Philippines, Los Banos. As a field of practice, the pioneering scholarships of Quebrals' students including Celeste Cadiz, Felix Librero, Antonio Moran, Alexander Flor, Pedro Bueno, Rex Navaro, and other researchers such as Celia R. Taylor, Guy Bessette, among others heightened discussions of Participatory Development Communication as a valid and necessary approach to development interventions. Participatory communication encourages the critical engagement of development intervention beneficiaries in their own development processes. It therefore advocates for the devolution of knowledge, authority and control of development initiatives hitherto considered the preserve of interventionist, to truly reflect the aspirations, desires, needs and thinking of beneficiaries (Cherdpong & Flor, 2014; Bordenave, 1994). Klees et al. (1986) asserts, "for advocates of grassroots development, participation has become the benchmark for measuring the effectiveness of grassroots processes" (cited in Tamminga, 1997 p. 94).

However, for any meaningful progress to be achieved in any developmental programme, the government should ensure that the beneficiaries are part of the entire process, hence this study examines the media and development communication as catalysts for development in Port Harcourt City Local government area.

Statement of Problem

It is quite observable that those in remote rural areas of the country lack essential information on basic rights and entitlements,

public services, public budgets, health, education and working opportunities, agricultural prices and other market information which would enable them to take control of their lives. Poor access to information and relevant communication facilities is a key factors in the exclusion of poor people from participating in governance processes. Many people living in rural and mountainous areas live outside the coverage of the country's radio stations (national, regional, as well as local).

Urban dwellers that seem opportune to have access to various media types in view of the vibrant and commercial nature of urban life are often disconnected from information on government development projects. Most times, people simply wake up to realize that the government has embarked on one project or the other without fore-knowledge especially if such projects might affect their daily lives. Nevertheless, even though there are times the government utilizes the media to inform the public on projects such as heavy road construction where traffic has to be diverted, what happens in other scenarios is considered small-scale but which still have some discomforting impact on the public?

This question then comes to mind, what is the 'ever-vibrant' media doing to ensure that people are not caught unawares when for instance, a road user gets to a part of town to realize that traffic had been diverted due to one construction or the other? How effective are local radio stations in keeping people informed on these seemingly 'little-discomforts'? In view of the fact that knowledge and information are essential for people to successfully respond to the opportunities and challenges of social, economic and technological changes, there is a need to assess the extent to which the Nigerian media has bridged the information gap that exists between government and the populace. Therefore this study investigates the media and development communication as catalysts for sustainable development.

Literature Review

Development as a Concept

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 multi-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. 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 realisation 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 changes. The essence of development according to Asemah is the development of people with change in their attitude, leading to change of habits. This means that just changing things without concurrent change of habit or attitude is not a healthy development. Development is seen as a changing process of knowledge, attitude and practices. It is in this context that the writer looks at development. Keghku (2005, p. 53) says that development generally implies change.

Development Communication

Kutufam (2011) describes development communication as a special area within the field of mass communication, focusing on the

use of mass communication tools for socio-economic development in developing countries. In order to understand the role of development communication in the development process, there is the need for a systematic understanding of development and communication as two processes that are inseparable by their nature when defined in relationship to their environment and others within the environment.

Development programmes focus attention on the socio-economic development of the recipient community, and so most literature on development communication have focused on the socio-economic impact of these programs on the recipients. Development communication serves as a common platform between funding agencies or implementers of development programs and program recipients, by creating an avenue for dialogue and the exchange of ideas. In the participatory model of development communication, the transmission of information is not a vertical process of information flow from the knowledgeable to the less knowledgeable; instead it is a horizontal process of information exchange and interaction (Morris, 2003).

This model posits that the purpose of development is to empower people so they have greater control and power over decisions that affect them. Thus, empowerment is achieved through information exchange and interaction between development agencies and recipients of development programmes (Morris, 2003). In every social interaction, the forces of power come into play and the direction or the use of power determines the success of such an interaction. Development communication is culturally contextual, people oriented, empowering, and egalitarian.

In a similar manner, for awareness on government development projects to reach as much of the populace as possible, there is a need to recognize the fact that initial awareness messages need to be re-transmitted, discussed, and re-discussed among audience members in order for it to have a lasting effect. Awareness does not stop at only that

which comes from the media but instead, how it is turned into a subject-matter for public discourse for it to have a resonant and lasting effect.

Opara (2007), citing Daramola (2003) observes that the media have an intricate relationship with the economy. Without the media, which maintain a constant flow of information vital for economic progress, economic and social life of the people as well as national development will suffer. Through TV programming, the government is informed about the level of acceptance or otherwise of its policies and programmes by the populace.

Onabajo (2000) observes that Searchlight on African Independent Television (AIT) was conceptualized as a programme that enlightens and entertains the audience. The programme shares human interest problems and also balances them by bringing serious societal problems. Also, government default is criticized in a humorous way. The philosophy of the programme is to provide a form of heart-to-heart forum of presentation that will inform, educate, and enlighten its audience. Also, the programme draws attention to serious operational lapses of corporate and public organizations, government agencies and parastatals.

Writing on the role of television programming in national development; a case study of "Newline", NTA network service, Opara (2007) opines that TV programming plays significant roles in accelerating comprehensive national development. Findings of the study revealed that; television remains the most versatile and most effective media of communication and it exerts enormous influence on the people. Also, majority of the respondents hold the view that television programmes, particularly "News Line", have been contributing to the cultural and socio-economic development of the country. The study further revealed that government functionaries and agencies hold "News Line" in very high esteem, as a programme that

binds the people and the government together in mutual interest of responsible citizenship and good governance.

Using the diffusion model, Servaes and Malikhao (2004, p.7), writing a background paper on Communication and Sustainable Development, note that:

“Although development strategies in developing countries diverge widely, the usual pattern for broadcasting and the press has been predominantly the same; informing the population about projects, illustrating the advantages of these projects and recommending that they be supported.

According to the study of Mukherjee (2007), communication is viewed as a participatory process, for achieving development for the people and by the people themselves. In this context, participation is understood as developing the human, organizational and management capacities of the people to address the issues, as they arise, in order to sustain the process of change and development. The study revealed that development communication is more often a linear process in both government and non-government organizations. It is more pronounced in the government programmes because of the attitude of the people working and their pattern of working. Voluntary organisations working in the area though have better mechanisms for promoting two way communication but in actual field situation despite their best efforts, it sometimes becomes a one way process.

The mass media appear to be more effective in disseminating new information than in (directly) changing behaviour or attitudes. They appear to have little persuasive effect without reinforcement by interpersonal communication in an informal group context. While the mass media may not directly 'cause' social change, the ideas presented through mass communication often become both normalised and become the topics and ideas discussed inter-personally (Leal and Borner, 2005).

Writing on Radio and the Internet: Mixing media to bridge the Divide, Girard (2003, p.7), writes that:

Low production and distribution costs have made it possible for radio to interpret the world from local perspectives, and to respond to local needs for information. More than any other mass communication medium, radio speaks in the language and with the accent of its community. Its programming reflects local interests and it can make important contributions to both the heritage and the development of the cultures, economies and communities that surround it.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on development media theory. The development media theory was formulated by McQuail in 1987. This theory seeks to explain the normative behaviours of the press in countries that are conventionally classified together as developing countries.

The theory owes its origin to the UNESCO's MacBride Commission set up in 1979. This theory is opposed to dependency and foreign domination and to arbitrary authoritarianism. It accepts economic development and nation building as overriding objectives. Press freedom should be opened to restriction according to economic priorities and the development needs of the society. In the interest of development ends, the state has the ultimate control (Ndolo, 2005).

The theory holds that the media have a role to play in facilitating the process of 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 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. Summarily, the fundamental tenets of the theory as identified by McQuail (1987) are:

1. Media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy;
2. Freedom of the press should be opened to restriction according to economic priorities and development needs of the society;
3. Media should give priority in news and information to link with other developing countries, which are close geographically, culturally or politically; in the interest of development ends, the state has the right to intervene in or restrict media operations and devices of censorship, subsidy and direct control can be justified; and
4. Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities, as well as, freedoms in their information gathering and dissemination tasks.

The theory is relevant to the study because it lays emphasis on using the media to develop the society through development communication. 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.

Empirical Review

In a study by Faisal and Alhassan (2018), entitled “Community Access and Participation in Community Radio Broadcast: Case of Radio Gaakii, Ghana, the paper also investigates the frequency of community members’ participation in the stations broadcast and ascertained the levels of satisfaction (or otherwise) of their participation in the radio broadcast. The study was based on cross sectional survey design. Multistage sampling was used in the sampling processes and 150 respondents across five listening communities were recruited for the purposes of data collection and analysis. The study found out that community participation in Radio Gaakii’s broadcast is limited to the radio programme listening stage and community members mostly participate through the use of mobile phones during specific programme phone-in segments of the broadcast. The study recommends establishing Radio Gaakii Listening Clubs to facilitate community’s participation in management, governance, programming and financing decisions to give true meaning to participation, create a sense of community ownership and ultimately, ensure sustainability of the Station.

Another study by Ubini and Oji (2021) titled “Influence of Melody FM Nigeria go better, A Pidgin English Radio Programme in Creating Development Awareness in Warri, Nigeria” The study investigates how radio has been used as a carrier of development information to create awareness on development issues among people of Warri, Nigeria. The study builds on what researchers have recognized as the strength of radio in spurring peoples’ interest and participation in development matters. The study adopts the cross-sectional research method to sample the views of 240 respondents drawn from Warri population. The graduated data derived from a Likert scale which were statistically analysed using percentages. The findings reaffirmed the rationalized position of scholars on the use of radio in the direction of

development. The sustainability of the programme and the quest for future capable hands to continue to run the programme however remain a worry to the people.

Research Methodology

The design for the study was a descriptive survey. A descriptive survey according to Ali (2006) is concerned with describing events as they are without any manipulation of what is being observed. Ihechu and Ukaegbu (2018) also posit that descriptive research is concerned with the collection of data from a well-defined population which is used to describe the present condition of the population using variables under investigation. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to identify the characteristics of the population objectively.

This study was carried out in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area of Rivers State. The people are cosmopolitan in nature with many traders as well as public and civil servants. The choice of the area for the study was informed by the researcher's beliefs that the residents of Port Harcourt are well informed. Available statistics, from the National Population Commission (NPC) census 2006, show that the residents of the city are well educated. Thus, they can make informed decisions without being coerced or talked into doing something they are not interested in. According to NPC census of 2006 which is projected to 2021 by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the population of Port Harcourt stands at 1,148,665.

Sample size is the actual number of respondents that participated in the research. Ihechu and Ukaegbu (2018) assert that the sample is part of the population chosen for a survey or experiment. Sample size is that part of the population that helps us to draw information from the population. For the purpose of this study, the sample size of 200 was used. The instrument for data collection was the

questionnaire. A convenience sampling technique was used to elicit information from the 200 respondents selected across areas. 172 copies of questionnaire were correctly filled and returned out of the 200 copies of administered questionnaire. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Research Question 1: To what extent has the Nigerian media created awareness for government development projects?

Table 1. How often respondents come across information on government development projects in the selected media types

Ia	Television		Radio		Newspaper		Internet	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Very often	20	12.90%	24	18.90%	42	28.38%	14	22.22%
Often	69	44.52%	53	41.73%	66	44.60%	25	39.68%
Not so often	66	42.58%	50	39.37%	40	27.02%	24	38.10%
Total	155	100%	127	100%	148	100%	63	100%

Research Question 2:**Table 2.** How Informed Respondents Are On Government Development Projects

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Well informed	19	11.05%
Averagely informed	137	79.65%
Not informed	16	9.30%
Total	172	100%

Table 2 shows that 11.05% of respondents are “Well Informed” on government development projects, 79.65% are “Averagely Informed”, and 9.3% claim they are “Not Informed” on government development projects

Research Question 3. To what extent does the media coverage of government development projects affect public perception of their importance?

Table 3. Respondents have attached more importance to projects given more attention in the media and considered them to be more necessary than others.

This table shows how respondents reacted to projects given more attention by the media.

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes	65	37.80%
No	68	39.53%
Indifferent	39	22.67%
Total	172	100%

Table 4. Ways attention given to some development projects influenced the attitude of respondents

OPTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
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It has shown them to be more important to the society's needs	26	33.77%
It has only shown where the government is concentrating more of its efforts	33	42.86%
It has merely kept me more informed on areas given more attention.	17	22.07%
Others(Mostly kept abreast of ongoing projects)	1	1.30%
TOTAL	77	100%

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: To what extent has the Nigerian media created awareness for government development projects?

Table 1 shows that 12.90% of the respondents come across such information "Very Often". Another 44.52% only come across government development information "Often", suggesting they do not come across such information on a regular basis but rather, some times. 42.58% of respondents do not come across government development information often, and this can be likened to once in a very long while. More so, respondents demonstrate the consistency of getting information on government development projects while listening to radio. 18.90% respond to get the information "Very Often", 41.73% respond to only get the information "Often", and 39.37% respond not to get the information often; "Not So Often". The population of those who respond to only get information on government development projects "Often" and those who do not get the information often; "Not so often", 41.73% and 39.37% is almost at par. This suggests that there is no overwhelming evidence in terms of population to establish that radio indeed effectively provide information on government development projects. The 18.90% that responded to getting the information "Very Often" merely indicates that radio provides some

measure of information after all, but not at an overwhelming rate. 28.38% respond to getting the information “Very Often”, 44.60% responded to getting the information “Often”, and 27.02% responded “Not So Often” from newspaper. Finally on the internet 22.22% for “Very Often”, 39.68 for “Often” while 38.10 “Not so Often”.

Research Question 2: To what extent are individuals informed about government development projects?

Table 2 shows that 11.05% of respondents are “Well Informed” on government development projects, 79.65% are “Averagely Informed”, and 9.3% claim they are “Not Informed” on government development projects. This is to say that the media in Port Harcourt has informed residents of the city on developmental programmes and projects in the state.

Research Question 3: To what extent does the media coverage of government development projects affect public perception on their importance?

Table 3 show that 37.8% of respondents have attached more importance to projects given more attention in the media and considered them to be more necessary than others (with less attention). 39.53% of respondents have not attached more importance based on media coverage nor considered some projects to be more important than others based on media coverage. However, 22.67% are “Indifferent” on whether or not media gives some projects more attention or not and do not necessarily attach importance solely on media coverage. Summarily, more respondents (even though a slim majority) have submitted that they do not attach importance to some projects more than others simply because of excess media coverage on certain projects.

Table 4 show that 33.77% of the respondents believe media attention which is given to some development projects has shown them to be important to the society's need. 42.86% (which is the majority of respondents in this instance) are of the opinion that; it has only shown the development projects as where the government is concentrating more of its efforts. 22.07% of the respondents think the media attention given to some development projects has merely kept them informed on those areas given more attention.

Findings of the Study

1. The study found out that television has created more awareness for government development projects in comparison to radio, Newspapers, and the Internet.
2. The study established that respondents were well aware of government projects and programmes due to the media
3. The study also found out that majority of respondents attach as much importance to development projects as attached to such projects by the media - through coverage and reporting.

Conclusion

This study investigated media and development communication as catalysts for development in Port Harcourt Local Government Area. Three research objectives were used to guide the study, development theory was used to anchor the study and the survey method was used in the study. Therefore, the study concludes that the media is a partner in sustainable development.

Recommendations

1. Radio stations in Port Harcourt need to do better in keeping the public up to date on government development projects.
2. The media must equip the public with not just average information, but adequate information on basic rights and

entitlements, public services, public budgets, health, housing projects, road rehabilitation projects; especially those that could bring discomfort to road users so alternative routes could be plied if possible, education and working opportunities, agricultural prices and other market information which would enable them to efficiently utilise provision of diverse development projects, consequently, developing the right stimulation to participate in the development process

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