



# The Role of Community Radio Station In Rural Development In Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Community radio stations are uniquely placed to make a difference to society. This paper addresses the role of community radio on rural development in Nigeria by applying library based research method, necessary information were generated through literature review. Drawn from Democratic Participant Theory. This paper highlights that community radio has brought positive impacts particularly in eight thematic areas (i.e. Education, politics suitability, agricultural transformation, promoting participatory democracy, voice of voiceless, information/ discussion forum on local issues, empowering unprivileged rural people and contribution on good governance). Thus, better to offer radio programs by the local level authorities in such thematic areas for strengthening the rural development process in general and the rural community development process in particular.

**Keywords.** role, community radio, radio, democracy, development

## INTRODUCTION

Community radio stations around the globe has assumed a monumental growth in the last two decades in several nations of the world. This development is largely due to its potential to democratize and provide a horizontal form of communication, thus, contributing more meaningfully to development efforts than the other forms of broadcasting Wasiu (2015). Community radio is a type of radio service that offers a model of radio broadcasting beyond commercial and public service. According to UNESCO-community radio is being defined as ‘radio run by, for and about community’. This broad principle distinguished between state-owned or public service broadcasting, commercial, and community radio. Thomson (1998), community radio is a “radio broadcasting a specific locality, whose editorial trust reflects the news interest that environment and the airwave distribution is limited to the locality. Its broadcasting serves geographic communities and communities interests. The content of broadcasting is largely popular and relevant to a local or specific audience but may often be overlooked by commercial or mass-media broadcasters. Community radio stations are operated, owned, and driven by the communities they serve. Community radio is not-for-profit and provides a mechanism for facilitating individuals, groups, and communities to tell their own diverse stories, share experiences, and in a media-rich world become active creators and contributors of media. In many parts of the world today, community radio acts as a vehicle for the community and voluntary

sector, civil society, agencies, NGOs, and citizens to work in partnership to promote community development. By the core aims and objectives of this model of broadcasting, community radio stations often serve their listeners by offering a variety of content that is not necessarily provided by the larger commercial radio stations. Community radio can play a significant role at the grassroots level for rural development. For instance, issues of poverty, agriculture, gender inequality, education, and social problems among others could be the focus of programming. In exploring the importance of sharing information locally and the opening up of wider information networks for farmers in Northern Ghana concerning vernacular radio programs, Chapman (2003) found that rural radio is effective in improving the sharing of agricultural information by remote rural farming communities. Radio in this regard provides a set of participatory communication techniques that support agricultural extension efforts by using local languages to communicate directly with farmers and listeners' groups. Community radio not only continues to be a medium for the transmission and revitalization of Indigenous languages, cultures and worldviews, it also continues to be a primary medium to inform and communicate issues that affect and interest the constituency it serves, especially for rural communities where reliable internet access is lacking Cojti, (202.) . Community radio provides the marginalized rural and poor people an opportunity to discuss issues and government policies as they affect them Adeoye (2020) For example, in Nigeria, there are ecological problems, communal conflicts, and lack of basic amenities such as good road, hospital, recreational facilities and so on.

### **COMMUNITY RADIO AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

Media is widely taken as a tool to promote and create awareness and help people positive behavioral changes in the society. It has been often credited for development of our society. More so, the term 'rural' refers the territories which lie outside of urban areas (Asemah 2013). It is a location which falls under disadvantageous geographical conditions, residents live in relatively shabby houses which are dispersed and public services and facilities are virtually non-existent. Rural areas usually have limited or absence of facilities like electricity and water supplies, access roads, transportation services, public health and educational facilities and other public infrastructures (Asemah 2013). Due to the lack of development infrastructures and basic facilities, the locals of the rural areas often face several problems. The economic activities are limited to farming, animal husbandry, fisheries and home manufacturing. Educational level and literacy rate also low, people have limited or low opportunities to work and per-capita household incomes are remains also low. A society that hears its people is a society that will transform itself. For sustainable development to occur on the scale that is required for the success of the transformation agenda of the present administration, there has to occur the "massification" of communication, which can only happen through community media. A proper understanding of Community media and their associated processes is required for overcoming the problems of proper integration of rural communities into the processes of national development. They are crucial to strengthening cultural identities and building communities, without which genuine development cannot be realized, much less sustained.

The term Rural Development means as overall development such as social, economic, political and cultural of rural society so that its people could live a dignified life. The all the interventions aimed at improving productivity, increasing employment and thereby incomes, having food security, access to shelter, education, health and housing is termed as rural development (Anaeto & Anaeto, 2010).

Rural areas often suffer from isolation and often face lack of communication with the other part of the world. Information and communication is often termed as power in this 21st century which is vitally important for development of people. However, the rural areas are often detached from all

kinds of information and a digital divide is created which discriminate themselves from the outside world. In this context, Mass Media are the ones which link them with the rest of the world and provide a source of information that is happening around the world. Rural people need information about the happenings in and around the society which makes their living better (Anaeto & Anaeto, 2010).

Rural society is often termed as conservative dealing with in any issues such as approach to health and education, farming practices and others. Unless and until a fundamental change in the way people's approach to education, employment, entrepreneurship, farming practices, rate of new technologies adaptations, transportations, and market access among others, no development is possible. For this, rural communities need to be informed on the importance of adapting these new practices. For this, mass media can be a source of information and awareness. Information and awareness are considered as the catalyst of change in any society.

### **THE COMMUNITY RADIO FOR RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Nigeria is predominantly a developing country where significant number of people still live in rural areas. Since other forms of mass media do not exist and survive, local or community radios are common mass medium operating in the rural areas in Nigeria. Experts often have different views regarding local and community radio. Local radio is not the same as community radio in broad sense. There are clearly distinctions. In principle, it is usually for the people, run by the people, and owned by the people. It enhances the capacities of local people to work together to tackle social problems including poverty, and exclusion.

This is a medium of expressing and sharing views, thoughts, ideas, problems, and prospects of rural, disadvantaged, and vulnerable, to reach the population with the mainstream population. It helps to avail utilities and amenities for various development aspects of our societies like education, health, water, sanitation, protection from natural disasters, and address social issues at the community level. It may also be useful for the development of particular targets such as elderly women, and children. Even radio provides special attention to the fields of education, spreading of literacy, agriculture, rural development, environment, health, and family welfare as well as science and technology fields. A community radio is one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community. They are not operated for profit making rather to give a voice to voiceless, marginalized people of rural society (Girard, 1992)

There are basically two kinds of community radios operating in the rural community in Nigeria, namely, radios run by tertiary institution such as campus FM, radios run by Local Administration. However, the basic notion of all the radios are same; small community owned and managed, serving the community and no-commercial and non-profit making in purpose. There are other kinds of radio also operating in the rural areas owned private company which is generally referred as commercial radio. Theoretically and legally (in registration or getting licensing), there is no clear distinction between private and community (run by tertiary institution, local administration unit and NGOs) in Nigeria, their approach and motive is somewhat different. Nonetheless, unlike national radio stations, these radios broadcast relevant information to the communities where they operate.

Therefore, be it commercial or community, by and large they are familiar with the needs and desires of their community members, and providing information as per the need of the people. Nigeria is considered a pioneer in terms of development of local radio in West Africa. "Nigeria has been among the countries in West Africa where the community radio movement has been most successful and it played a vital role in disseminating information and promoting dialogue for peace," (AMARC appeals, 2005). FM radios are the leading media that are contributing in rural communication and it is being more widespread and effective with the emergence of local and community Radio stations. Various studies

conducted by researchers in Nigeria and beyond have clearly demonstrated that local radio can contribute a lot to the community to make life of the community people better.

According to Mahmud (2006), community radio is a prior agenda that can help building up participatory practice in the society, which leads to people's governance. It can facilitate people's access and promote their participation in local level decision-making process, which ultimately results in participatory governance in the society. We can say community radio can play the role as promoter of participatory, accountable and transparent governance system in a society and it can also create enormous opportunities for growth and poverty reduction. Community radio contributes to promote participation, share opinion, knowledge and skills improving and diversification and in catering to health and cultural needs of the rural communities, especially in the developing countries (Wabwire, 2013).

### **THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY RADIO IN NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENT**

The most accessible of all the mass media types in Nigeria. For instance, Pate (2006, p.27) describes radio as —the most patronized means of mass communication in Nigeria. Quoting the 1999 National Demographic and Health Survey, Pate remarks that 62 per cent of households in Nigeria own one or more radio sets. Things have even become better as more people now have access to radio stations through their mobile handsets. At the moment, Nigeria is confronted with a myriad of sociopolitical and economic problems. Community radio is expected to play vital role in mobilizing the rural populace. Majority of Nigerians living in the vast rural Community socio politically cut off from the mainstream media. They are hardly heard because news is about prominence. Therefore, community radio, when fully operational in Nigeria, will be expected to give voice to the local population in the following areas:

#### **Education**

Literacy level in the rural areas of Nigeria is still very low. National literacy rate is 67 percent (Akingbulu & Menkiti, 2008, p.12). Majority of people uneducated people lives in the rural areas where educational facilities are either non existent or inadequate. Community radio will be a vital tool in adult education. It is difficult to conceive development in modern times without one form of education or the other.

#### **Suitability**

The rural communities are often separated by mountains, valleys, gorges or rivers. Since, transportation and communication infrastructures in all these areas are underdeveloped or semi-developed, local/communities radios are an appropriate medium in these remote and geographically and culturally diverse areas. These radios use technologies which are appropriate and affordable. Operation cost also relatively low in comparison to other media such as print and television. Radio is cost-effective medium with comparatively simple technology, and more suitable for illiterate people (Pavara & Vinod 2003).

Most of the times, radio is the only mass medium available in the rural communities. With poor transportation systems and low purchasing power, it can be the most appropriate medium of mass communication (Fraser & Estrada, 2001). Radio is oral mass media and therefore, low literacy level of rural people cannot limit the access. As it has low production and distribution costs, it can be affordable, sustainable, effective, powerful and local. It can cover large numbers of scattered

populations. According to Ambekar (2004), people can listen to its programs without disturbing their household chores and other activities. In most of the rural areas, it is the only source of information about employment, livelihood options, agricultural practices, access to market and market prices of agricultural produces.

In this context, local radio can become the most effective medium of communication for community members in isolated villages (Banjade, 2007). Thus, this medium can reach out to the most remote communities and to people from all walks of life (Buckley, 2006).

### **Agricultural Transformation**

The term rural development is often discussed together with agricultural development. In Nigeria, most agricultural communities live in rural areas and most people in rural areas depend on agriculture for their livelihood. The basic life necessities like food, shelter and clothing is fulfilled by the income generated from agriculture. In order to develop the rural areas, it is important that the agricultural sector is developed. Development implies change and change in the attitude of the farmers is one of major indicator of rural development.

Farming is a major economic activity or profession or livelihood option for rural people. However, the productivity is low due to low level of awareness or education of rural people. For this, the major cause is lack of scientific knowledge of farming. For reaching the basic agricultural information to users in rural areas today, local radios are only and easy medium which could contribute to promote the agriculture sector in rural areas (Khanal, 1989). The pivotal role of local radio therefore becomes handy.

Local radios help passing the vital information for agricultural development for example information on better farming methods, improved seeds, timely planting, agro-forestry, better harvesting methods, soil conservation, marketing, post harvest handling and diversification among others (Wabwire, 2013). It also informs rural people about appropriate modern technologies and improves and implements indigenous technologies. Further, local radio gives farmers an opportunity to interact with each other and other relevant authorities like farm workers, crop and animal experts through programs like live talk shows, phone-in programs and on location broadcasts (Banjade, 2007). On the top of that local radio enables communities to articulate their experiences and to critically examine issues and policies affecting their lives. These policies can be debated and discussed and immediate feedback can be given for relevant authorities to take action (Banjade, (2007).

### **PROMOTING PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY**

Community radio gives community members access to information because as local radios provides access to the means of communication them. Local radios work as a common forum where people are given the opportunity to express themselves socially, politically and culturally. These radios prioritize important local issues. Mostly educational and developmental information are disseminated and exchanged. Further, it informs about the development activities in rural areas and exposes rural problems to government agencies and NGOs strengthening democratic practices in rural areas. Local radio/community radio encourage community members take the lead for their own cause. They can reinforce traditional forms of communication such as storytelling and group discussion enabling grassroots participation in policy-making and democracy. It also supports community members in introduction of income-generating activities (Banjade, 2007).

## **Voice of Voiceless**

Community radios are known as small community owned and locally managed. The philosophy of community radio is considered as the voice of the voiceless. It is considered as the medium which help raise voice of socially and economically deprived people and generally as a tool for development (AMARC, 1981). These radios serve people, encourage expression and participation and value local culture increasing access to information and empowering the communities. It works as a tool for highlighting their fundamental rights of marginalized communities and became the voice of the poor and the voiceless, the landless peasants and impoverished indigenous people (Wabwire, 2013).

They demystify the scientific jargon and help explain the research and scientific information in simpler and ordinary language that people can easily understand. They assist the development of local communities by providing relevant information in local languages. One of the major benefits of such radio is empowering local people to speak up for themselves. Since local radios are one and only source of information in rural areas, these radios provide a forum for the exchange of knowledge, information and experiences. Therefore, it gives voice to rural people. These local radios could also expose rural people and local talents, local champions who are serving their communities in various ways.

### **Information/ Discussion Forum on Local Issues**

Since, local radios are set up in the community and for the community members, these radio become well aware about needs and problems of community people due to proximity to the listeners. They know community members and they are always sensitive to what their listener wants. Therefore, local radio stations talk about every specific problem in the communities they serve (Banjade, 2007). They emphasize contents, namely, political and economic news that facilitates community dialogue and involvement, community and personal messages, information programs, and culturally relevant entertainment. It provides the platform for debates in communities (Patel, 1998). Through access of relevant information and debate, these radios contribute for community empowerment.

### **Empowering Unprivileged Rural People**

Empowerment is a process where people become aware of how power relations operate in their lives (Nirmala, 2015). With more awareness, people gain self-confidence and strength to challenge various social injustices, problems and inequalities within society. The information provided by newspapers, radio, and television shapes their opinions. In rural context, local/community radios work as a substitute for formal education. It contributes on rising awareness regarding women's development, environment conservation, scientific farming, entrepreneurship, employment options and many more. By providing timely and relevant information on injustice, opportunities, experiences, skills, development issues and public interests, local radios has the ability to involve rural communities, women, indigenous people and underprivileged people in an interactive social communication process. By providing debate and discussion on the various local issues, it empowers locals on various issues. The process of empowerment enables people to develop in them self-dignity. It enables them to raise voice and fight against injustice, exploitation, abuse, and violence done to them. It contributes to sustainable development by enabling people to take control over their own livelihoods, identifying their needs and problems and providing access to knowledge and information to enable informed choices.

### **Contribution on Good Governance**

Democracy is all matters the government of the people, by the people and for the people. The participation of people in the governance has been hampered over the years because of the

inaccessibility to and unavailability of media outlets in the rural areas. In-between elections, people are expected to participate actively in public affairs, through robust debates on issues that affect their lives. Besides that, the need exists for constant flow of information that allows people take informed decisions on matters of public interest. There is need for the education of the rural populace on political matters. Also In a democracy, the watchdog role of media is vital where it let people know about what is happening in the society (Ashraf, 2014).

Media check on the state which is considered as its primary democratic function. Media has an important role to play in shaping a healthy democracy and ensuring good governs. According to Norris, the media has three key roles in contributing to democratization and good governance. Watchdog over the powerful, promoting accountability, transparency and public scrutiny are often credited for mass media in terms of its very vital function. Local radio too serves as a watchdog on power holders in the society, affording active relationships between local leaders and the members in the society. Highlighting the policy failures, maladministration, corruption and scandals of the local government, local radio fulfils the watchdog role. Buckley (2006) argues that community media can contribute to good governance by identifying corruption and holding leaders to account.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Development Media Theory The main thrust of the development media theory is how the media can be used in developing countries to promote development. According to the proponent Denis McQuail (2000), mass media serve as agents of development by: disseminating Instead of a centralized, high – cost or state controlled media, this theory advocates small – scale, local, non – institutional committed media which link senders to receivers and also favor horizontal patterns of interaction. Community radio fits perfectly into the structure being advocated by this theory. It is owned by the community, managed by the community, broadcast in the local language and is not for profit purpose. technical knowledge encouraging individual change and mobility, spreading democracy (election), promoting consumer demand and aiding literacy, education, health, population control. The media serve as catmedst or development is not in doubt. If properly managed, the media can be used to promote development in all its ramifications. Towards this ends, the media will serve as agents of mobilization for development. As agents of mobilization, Rosengren (2000) observes that the media provide formal, educationally oriented socialization. He adds further that the media help to exiting structures of power at the same time as preparing the ground for those on-going processes of change so vital to any modern, industrial and post-industrial society and presumably, to all post-modern ones as well. Community radio is suited for the tasks assigned to the media under this theory.

### **CONCLUSION**

Rural radio is considered very important aspect in the rural area. It helps to cater the information need of rural people. Community or local media have significant role to play in rural development. Although like all other mass media, the basic or direct function of this local radio is to provide the rural community information on various contemporary issues that is happening everyday around the community, country and beyond. It focuses on the programs that would be helpful to the rural and agricultural based people. However, being the single or handful communication media being exist in the locality, it has divergent roles to play ultimately contributing to social change and development of rural community. On one hand, it could be source of education for some members of the community

as it provides important lesson learned and share experiences of others while on the other hand, it could also be the medium for inspiration or encouragement for many.

It could also be a tool to express their voices against social injustices and discriminations being faced in the society and empowering themselves. The local radios could also play vital role in checking the widespread crimes, corruptions and other irregularities that is happening in the country and community and play the watch dog role. A community radio is an effective means of social change. It can play a vital role promoting local language, culture, development, co-operation and harmony in the society. It also makes the local people aware of their rights and duties. The community radio gives opportunity to express problems, success, grievances experiences, ideas and talent. All in all, the local or community media provides a forum to rural people, provides important information, awareness, empowers them and contributes to the sustainable development of the society.

## RECOMMENDATION

To enjoy the benefit of community radio the following recommendation are highlighted by the researcher

1. Remote communities in Nigeria can be developed and express their problems and demands through establishing a community radio station that will ensure their socio-economic development.

2. Train-up people to manage the system and create contents/programs which will express the views and sufferings of marginalized and vulnerable groups.

3. Ensure access and participation, diversity, independence and locality, so that members of the marginalized group can express their problems and difficulties through community FM radio station

4. Ensure multi-use of community FM radio i.e. Spreading information of education, health and other nationally important issues.

It is important for advocates of community radio; rural communities based non-governmental agencies and other developmental agencies to raise government interest by pressuring, lobbying and pushing bills that could morph into acts or laws that will foster grassroots radio communication owned and operated by the people of the area

5. Nigerian government should take advantage of community radio to democratize communication at grassroots level because this can be an important resource to positively and qualitatively expedite progress.

6. Regular feedback from the listening public is essential in identifying listeners' preferences and the taste of various listeners segments (youth, women, men, aged, etc)

7. For Community Radio to be able to play this important and significant role in community development, it must keep out of politics and religion and highlight on gender issues

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