

Mass Media and Grass Roots Mobilization in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

A vast number of the world's population live in the rural areas and there is the need to properly sensitize them to key into the various initiatives of government and all other developmental programmes by individuals and corporate organizations. The rural populace can only get to know about these programmes through the mass media as well as other modes of communication. This review therefore examines the role of rural journalism in mobilizing rural dwellers to support various initiatives as well as how it can be used to further mobilize the rural dwellers to support developmental programmes. The aim is to awaken the consciousness of government, journalists and the society at large to the strategic role of the mass media in getting the rural populace to key into their various programmes since they constitute a larger population of Nigerians. The theoretical framework of this study is anchored on the Agenda-Setting Theory. The work discusses the concept of mobilisation and social mobilisation, the role of the mass media in social mobilisation and the mass media as a mobilization tool. Hence, rural community media should not be used as a one way system such that it is only information from the government that should be pass across rather it should be that of rural to government and government to grass roots communication.

Keywords: *Grass roots, Journalism, Mobilization and Development*

INTRODUCTION

Communication is at the heart of all intercourse. Whenever men have come to establish regular relations with one another the nature of the systems of communication created between them, the forms these have taken and the measure of effectiveness they have attained have largely determined the chances of bringing communities closer together or of making them one and prospects of reducing tensions or settling conflicts whenever they have arisen (Sean, 1980). It was the need to address the imbalances in information flow between the developed north and the developing as well as the underdeveloped south that led to the setting up of the Sean MacBride Commission in December 1977. Regrettably, the recommendation of the Sean MacBride's Commission has not been able to solve the imbalances as there is still a large volume of problems in news flow. The argument of the South against the North may no longer hold sway because the imbalance which the South has accused the North of is pervasive in the southern countries as at today. The media content of Nigeria and all other countries in the southern block are still being dominated with happenings in their major cities at the detriment of the

rural areas. This has not meant well for the Nigerian rural populace and other southern countries due to the fact that the rural populace are alienated from happenings within their own countries. Grass roots journalism and mobilization are no doubt at present, considered as the most crucial issues in Nigeria and in most developing countries of the world. In Nigeria this assumption may get its credence from the various developmental programmes and campaigns initiated by the federal government since independence. These developmental plans which include the first National Development Plan of 1962 - 1968 and other developmental programmes like the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution, Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) and Presidential Amnesty Programme amongst others. The media have been recognized by communication scholars, the government and the society at large as potent tools for mobilizing the grass roots to enable them attain a better life. This accounts for why General Ibrahim Babangida the then military Head of State of Nigeria between (1985 - 1995) cited in Akinfeleye (1993) stated that:

No self sustaining development can take place in Nigeria without the masses of our people being effectively mobilized, genuinely motivated and properly organized for productive activity within the context of freedom, orderly progress and social justice.

Theories are a sine qua non to any empirical research. They provide the latitude for analyses and hypotheses testing, which are aimed at predicting phenomena relevant to any research work. Severin and Tankard (1982) cited by Tejumaiye (2003), note that “every scientist assumes an approach or a particular orientation when dealing with a subject or issue. This approach determines the concepts, questions, perspectives and procedures the scientist applies. This approach also shapes the hypotheses which are tested and eventually the theory, which is generated”. A good theory, according to Halloran (2000), therefore, is the most practical and useful tool at the disposal of the researcher. He states that a good theory provides the researcher with guidelines and suggests what directions the research should take and what questions are to be asked.

Halloran (2000) says further that a theory provides continuity and cohesion, and makes possible the accumulation of a corpus of knowledge, which is the hallmark of scientific endeavour. This work is therefore anchored on the Agenda-setting Theory. The historical antecedent of the agenda-setting theory of the mass media can be traced to the Pulitzer-prize winning author, Walter Lippman in 1922, when he stated that the mass media act as the mediator between the world outside and the pictures in our heads. A little over 40 years later, Cohen (1963), as noted by Wimmer and Dominick (2000), was to further articulate the idea, when he argued that the media may not always be successful in telling the people what to think, but they can be stunningly successful in telling the people what to think about. Also,

Lang and Lang, (Wimmer and Dominick, 2000) reinforced this notion by observing that “the mass media force attention to certain issues... They are constantly presenting objects, suggesting what individuals in the mass media should think about, know about, have feelings about”. Folarin (2005) enumerates the elements involved in agenda-setting to include:

- (1) The quantity or frequency of reporting;
- (2) Prominence given to the reports – through headline display, pictures and layout in newspapers, magazines, film, graphics, or timing on radio and television.
- (3) The degree of conflict generated in the reports; and
- (4) Cumulative media-specific effects overtime.

Social Mobilisation and Grass roots Journalism

From inception, man has been and is still a mobiliser, such that man has always been in the business of telling people to channel their support or resources towards a social cause. He has done this function either as an individual or a group. From a general view, mobilization can be seen as a process whereby a people can be sensitized to pursue a social change goal or objective for themselves. In a nutshell therefore, mobilization is all about how the society or individual(s) can be informed about things especially developmental programmes around them. However, in treating this subheading, the concepts of mobilization and development will be dealt with. The need for bringing the concept of development arises because development is closely connected with mobilization such that it is from development that come the concept of mobilization.

A Political Scientist, Karl Deutsch cited in Obasanjo and Mabogunje (1991) defines mobilization as a process in which major clusters of old, social economic and psychological commitment are eroded and broken and people become available for new pattern of socialization and behaviour. Accordingly to Udokah cited in Nwodu and Ukozor (2003), “mobilisation is the awakening or activation of the dominant consciousness of a greater number of people with the use of views, ideas for the purpose of gaining their support for an action or inaction. It is a process of creating new loyalties. Using new ideas and appeals to reason and sentiment at the appropriate time. It entails building and sustaining cohesive alliance between development agents and targets or beneficiaries of a given developmental programme as well as serving their support and participation in the programme”. FGN (1987) notes that human history is dotted with examples of massive efforts to mobilize different human societies to achieve some set goals. The report states that to mobilize people is to increase their level of awareness of certain set objectives with a view to achieving those objectives. Social mobilization is traditionally perceived as a community-based or country-level action. The guiding principle of this series, though, is to recognize new scope for social mobilization strategies at both a global and

local level. This “new” social mobilization takes advantage of constantly evolving communications tools and technologies, acknowledges the impact of globalization and recognizes a “community” as being defined by shared issues across borders rather than by locality alone. Social mobilization begins with a conscious recognition of the problem to be addressed. Only when people become aware of how the epidemic matters to them and what action they can take, will true social mobilization begin. Social mobilization, according to Political Bureau Report (1987) cited by Adamolekun (1989) must be seen in terms of involving the people in taking part actively and freely in discussions and decisions affecting their general welfare. In other words, social mobilisation and political education should aim at increasing people’s level of awareness or cognition of political and other issues so that they can apply their energies positively and participate actively in the social and political life of the country.

The extent to which mass mobilization is organized versus spontaneous and the extent to which it relies on reason versus emotions are still debated by scholars. Social mobilization, as defined by United Nations Immunization Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF), on its website www.unicef.org in December 2013, is a process that engages and motivates a wide range of partners and allies at national and local levels to raise awareness of and demand for a particular development objective through face-to-face dialogue. UNICEF further explained that “members of institutions, community networks, civil and religious groups and others work in a coordinated way to reach specific groups of people for dialogue with planned messages”. The body further notes that social mobilization seeks to facilitate change through a range of players engaged in interrelated and complementary efforts. Mobilizing the necessary resources, disseminating information tailored to targeted audiences, generating inter-sectoral support and fostering cross-professional alliances are also part of the process.

While the components of the process may be everyday practice in many development programs, they tend to be taken up in isolation of each other. Social mobilization in total, aims at a continuum of activities in a broad strategic framework. The process encompasses dialogue and partnership with a wide spectrum of societal elements. At the policy level, the outcomes should be a supportive framework for decision making and resource allocation to empower communities to act at the grass roots level. The outcomes should be people’s active involvement ranging from identifying a need to implementation in achieving the development objective and evaluation effort. The solidarity of bureaucrats and technocrats and a broad alliance of partners among various non governmental groups are equally critical for the attainment of any change-oriented development goal. Simply stated, social mobilization calls for a journey among partners and results in the successful transformation of development goals into societal action. From the foregoing it is only developmental plans that lead to securing people support which is mobilisation.

Therefore grass roots mobilization could be seen as the process of securing the support of people at the rural areas to pursue economic, social and political changes for themselves. Over the years, governments and individuals have recognized the importance of grass roots mobilization. This is because grass roots mobilization leads to national mobilization. This was why a former president of Nigeria, General Ibrahim Babangida as cited in Akinfeleye (1993) while expressing his concern for grass roots mobilization noted that". "We should ensure that information flows from the government to the grass roots and the true feelings of the grass roots must always be truly and accurately reported to enable them to formulate an pursue policies that are people oriented".

Jerry (1989) in expressing his support for grass roots mobilization in a paper said "in a country that has a large population size such as Nigeria. It is impossible to mobilize the entire population through centralized directive. There can be no progress unless beneficial change occurs at the local level". Okonkwo (1990) posits that to attain the goal of national development the policy must anchor and manifest on the ground, must "involve" the rural man in his home setting". Larry Kerny – quoted in Okonkwo (1995) says that the proper organisation of the nation's territorial space and people therein, right down to the grass roots is a fundamental requirement, if the rural development strategies and programmes must take roots and sprout.

Mass media as a mobilization tool

The rise of development journalism led to the rise of the media being used for mobilization purposes, so that developmental stories and issues will be brought closer to the rural man. The question of what is development journalism comes to mind. Developmental journalism is the type of journalism that looks beyond the conventional news and feature criteria and develop the ability to offer news and features stories that will be useful to readers, viewers and listeners in rural areas in a variety of ways (Daramola, 2001). The quest for conventional news and features to serve the need of the grass roots gave rise to the contextual modification and adjustments of features and news. Moreover, before the arrival of the modern mass media as part of the rural community media the traditional media were the major channel of information which were use to communicate mobilization ideas to the grass roots.

According to Wilson (1991), these traditional media include idiophones, membrane phones, areophone, symbology, and signals, objectify which include kola nut, the young unopened buds of the palm frond, charcoal, white pigeon or fowls, white egg, feathers, cowries, mimosa, flowers, sculleries, picture, town criers, village arena etc. But with the emergent of modern mass media which has the grass roots at heart has given the concept a broader perspective to include the traditional and modern mass media. These modern mass media include community newspaper. However, though the community television and community radio are not so pronounce

in the Nigerian environment. The Nigeria environment over the year, have witness the birth and demise of a number of urban base rural circulated newspaper. Some of them include *Udoka*, *Isokan* the brain child of Chief M. K. O. Abiola, *Mirror of Onitsha*, *Community Concord*, *Gaskiya Tafi Kwaobo*, in Nwodu and Ukozor (2003). Thus, rural community media according to Canfield and More quoted in Nwosu (1995) as one which operates within and targets that particulars community”. The role of the mass media as a communication media cannot be jettison. Schramm (1964), in his legendary work on “Media role in National Development” stresses that communication is always at the very centre of existence of any society, developing or not” the importance of information sharing according to him is especially crucial.

Wilson (1991) stating the function of the mass media in grass roots mobilisation said the mass media is a “vital tool for the development of rural areas in Nigeria because its serves as a potent source of socio-cultural, health and political transmission and adaptation thereby helping the masses to attain point of self-actualization and national development through songs, instruction, theatre performance and general surveillance, traditional media provide education in the norms and mores of the society”. Nwosu (1995) supporting the function of mass media stated that the traditional media especially the village gong has some merits such as believability, intimacy, cheapness, urgency and immediacy, and the rural community media can penetrate to any extent. He further said that as community media is established to enable access to feed back and the clamour for community media is for deliberate, well-designed, properly articulated and targeted coverage of rural areas. Nwodu and Ukozor (2003) recognizing the function of mass media as communication media quoted Ikechukwu that

Such a multi – media approach will, for sure respect the research – and –experience supported fact that because of the high illiteracy factor among rural dwellers, and the problem of out – coming geographical and language barriers.

The electronic media, especially radio, seem to be the most effective media for promoting rural development. But it will also recognize that the print media (especially rural newspaper) and the traditional media or folk media like drums, market places, town criers system and others also have vital contributions to make in building the communication grid needed for balanced development. It is only with this kind of recognition that each medium will be given it rightful place and attention in the developmental communication equation”. Etukudo (1989) recognises that the function of town crier in the Nigerian rural community is an important communication link between the opinion leaders of the town and the rest of the people. That the town crier is often looked upon as the purveyor of news and the town crier must be a person of impeccable character and his message is as credible as he himself is seen to be”. He also noted the people are more easily influenced through the medium of their home paper than others and that using the traditional communication channels

such as the traditional council, the church, and school and age grade, interpersonal networked, the community newspaper plays a vital role in informing and educating the rural community". Oduko (1989) opines that the traditional communication media no doubt are part and parcel of the way of life in the villages, the traditions media which obviously would include drama, have been playing roles concerned with the survival and welfare of villages. Izuora (1993) identifying the role of the electronic media as part of the media in his study says that:

"The mobilization of the masses for effective participation in governmental programmes is such a crucial factor. Today, largely because numerous awareness programmes sent across by the broadcast media, many rural folks are abandoning many precious acts that have continually pulled society back"

Explaining further he said that the broadcasting media have also been tops through news, documentaries and current affairs, programmes in informing the populace far ways from the centre of happenings about day-to-day events. Furthermore, the community viewing centre as part of rural media is an effective tool as a communication media because it gives the rural populace a sense of belonging. Onabajo (2000) in supporting this view states that community viewing provides a good opportunity for packaging public service information in unambiguous form. In this way, adequate information on government, civil responsibilities, administrative changes within the state and also government ceremonies like the national day, the children's day.

From the above assertion of Onabajo (2000) it could be deduced that the community viewing centers as a communication media that help the grass roots to have an in-depth knowledge of mobilization programmes. Okonkwo cited in Wilson (1981) notes that a clear understanding of the structure pattern, processes and use of such media could enhance the multiple application of such channels for human and national growth. However, Wilson's approach to the relevance of the traditional systems of communication is perceptive and instructive. He asserts that "what constitutes traditional communication is not necessarily a matter of "age" civilization or technology conflicting with change, but rather a system which can be viewed within a communication continuum. Omu (1993) in recognizes the function of newspaper as part of the rural community media states that:

"It is common place that the newspaper is, in theory, best suited for mass education and general enlightenment of illiterate and semi-literate population because printed materials can be read and re-read at convenience. The theory can be made to fit the practice only if the newspapers penetrate the rural areas and put themselves at the service of rural modification.

Nwosu (1995) emphasizes the need for grass roots mobilization when he said. "One reason why there is a clamour for community or rural media is for a deliberate, well designed, properly activated targeted coverage of rural areas. In as much as

some of these media publish aspect of community news, they are wishy-washy, superficial peripheral and lousy”. Furthermore, television as part of the rural community media has played a vital role as a communication media such that it has the power of combining the power of audio-visual appeal because the grass roots people tends to believe what they see thus, it is an important medium because it can be used to communicate new methods of farming to the rural dwellers.

Moreover, the newspaper as a rural media is a vital communication tool for grass roots mobilization because it provides better interpreted or in-depth mobilization stories. Furthermore, the community newspaper places mobilization issues and fact in greater perspective, more so the newspaper as part of the communication media has the advantage of place and time of exposure / flexibility, which ensures easy comprehensive and retention of media content. Over the years, one medium of rural media which have been relegated to the minimal is poster. It should be noted that the bulk of the grass roots people are illiterate who cannot read and write but can recognized information through pictorial display when they are used in informing them. The use of poster helps in passing some information to the grass roots who are illiterate who cannot read the magazine or newspaper. Nwodu and Ukozor (2001) supporting the use of posters as communication media asserts as follows:

The resolve to spare some space for this medium stem from the fact that it yields a powerful influence in the awareness generation and diffusion of development information. The use of illustrations and few vernacular works in spreading development information has been most impactful, posters are therefore, useful in issues pertaining to attitude and behaviours change.

From Nwodu and Ukozor (2003) it could be deduced that the use of posters can give a lot of information about events such as outbreak of diseases, pre-natal care among many others could be communicated via this medium (poster), in conclusion the rural community media function as communication media cannot be over-emphasize such that it help in innovation diffusion and adaptation of the grass roots dwellers for mobilization programmes. No doubt in the past years in Nigeria the mass media have been used and misused, to promote or hinder development at the grass roots. In fact various governments both civilian and military have used media for grass roots mobilization. Considering this issue, Ugboajah (1978) tells the success story of the “Don Manuma” rural mobilization information campaign aimed at farmers in Northern Nigeria which used mainly the services of Radio Kaduna” and traditional communication networks such as drama to persuade farmers to adopt some innovative practices. A post evaluation of the project on campaign reevaluated that it succeeded as an effective way of teaching rural peasants the procedures and rules of mechanized farming, nutrition and how to carter for new crops. Furthermore, through the medium of the radio, agricultural research finding where compose into

Hausa songs which were communicated to the people via the media.

However, leaving the shore of Nigeria to give an example of a mobilization programme, a radio forum of campaign launched in Ghana by United Nations Education Socio-Cultural organization (UNESCO) also recorded positive results. This experimental project demonstrates that when the rural community media is skillfully used it is an effective medium of communication. The Directorate of food, Roads and rural infrastructure (DFRRI) was so successful because the role of rural community media as a vital tool in grass roots mobilization was highly recognized.

With this very high level of responsibilities the Directorate of food, road, and Rural Infrastructure must maintain constant dialogue with the ruralities so that their programmes will have community support... To do this they will need the support of the mass media to promote these laudable projects at the grass roots (Akinfeleye, 1993:110).

Other programmes that have also been successful as a result of the effective use of the media include the campaign against the use of expire and fake drugs/food items by National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), the fight against polio initiative initiated by the federal government.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt about the fact that grass roots journalism is necessary for gathering support for laudable developmental programmes. The need for mobilizing the grass roots should be the uppermost preoccupation of mobilization stories that the rural populace can be aware of development programmes, which they should participate in and in turn make them to achieve a better life for themselves. The mass media should be used as a medium of passing information about the plight, sufferings and problems of the grass roots to the government and the government also response via such medium. Therefore, rural community media should not be used as a one way system such that it is only information from the government that should be pass across, rather it should be that of rural to government and government to grass roots communication.

Young and fresh graduates who are grounded in communication intent should be encouraged to go into rural community media reporting so that the grass roots plight could be effectively reported. Editorial should not be used as personality profile rather they should be used to tell the grass roots people about mobilization programmes and how such mobilization programmes affect their lives, proffering solutions to how they can harness the benefits of such mobilization programmes. For the Nigerian Mass media to achieve the goal of mobilizing the grass roots all the component of the rural community media, that is, modern mass media and traditional media should be incorporated into the business of mobilizing the grass roots because if they are all incorporated there is the likelihood that if one component does not work the other will do the job of mobilization.

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