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# RURAL NIGERIA: Development and Quality of Life

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# Chapter 31

## The Mass Media in Rural Education and Development

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### INTRODUCTION

Development is a normative concept, in that it assumes that existing conditions are no longer conducive to human dignity and socioeconomic advancement and therefore should be changed for the better. It concerns every aspect of life and of the community. This is why it generally means different things to different people. Still, although seen from different angles, development means one thing - a change for the better in the conditions of the individual and the community. Where actual differences arise is on which aspect of development to lay priority emphasis: the physical or the human, the social or the economic.

To the economists and to governments in the developing world, priority emphasis should be on the physical, the economic, and the tangible aspects. To them, development (whether urban or rural) is a matter basically of increasing productivity. To the communicator, development is all that, and more. It must include the intangible, mental, and attitudinal changes that ensure a painless transition from one economic stage to another, and provide a solid socio-cultural base for meaningful and relevant advancement. This is why the communicator sees his role as that of smoothing the path to arrive at increased production, better health and social practices, and a higher standard of living, by creating an atmosphere for the exchange of ideas that will produce a happy balance between physical output and human relationships.

The agents for stimulating and sustaining this all-important communication that ensures a conducive societal base for physical development are the mass media, when used as vehicles of communication, rather than as channels for information. This distinction is necessary because, contrary to popular opinion, these mass media are not, by nature, channels of mass communication. They are merely channels of mass information, distribution, and transmission. And even though information is a necessary first step to communication, it is not communication. The mass media are one-way channels, which means that they are channels for making news, facts, figures and opinions available to the public. Communication occurs only when there is exchange of ideas; when those who receive news, facts and opinions are given the opportunity to discuss the issues



involved and to react meaningfully or even negatively. It is only when the mass media have been changed from acting as channels for distribution and transmission to asserting themselves as vehicles for participation, expression, and discussion that they can rightly be called the media of mass communication, and can become effective in inducing culture-bound rural inhabitants to strive to change their attitude to life by accommodating ideas that would improve the quality of their lives.

## THE RIGHT TO COMMUNICATION

This necessary base for successful development messages is hardly ever present between urban-oriented media men and the tradition-conscious rural inhabitants. They live in two different social worlds with views and opinions about the world and the society almost diametrically opposed. Such a situation does not favour communication through the one-way channel which the mass media are. But, through the process of availability, accessibility, and participation, conditions can be created which can make these media become very potent channels of communication. When the media are easily available and are accessible to target audiences, when these audiences are given the opportunity to take part in the decision-making processes about what goes into the media, how they are produced and at what level of presentation, when they are given the chance to participate and make direct contribution to programme content, a communication climate is created which facilitates not only learning but also acceptability of progressive ideas and conformity to agreed lines of action.

Therefore, if the mass media must be meaningfully used in rural development, and directed towards improving the quality of life, the rural population must not merely be guaranteed a *constitutionally legal right to communicate*. They must be given a *constitutionally guaranteed political and social right to communicate*. The former is a dead-letter right which is guaranteed only on paper. The latter is an action right. It recognizes not only the inalienable right of the rural man to make his views known, but also his ability to think rationally, and therefore the need to involve him both physically and mentally in activities directed towards making his world a better place to live in so that he can effectively contribute to national development.

This right, to which UNESCO is presently lending its weight, requires that governments should talk to the people in order to inform them, and also listen to the people in order to be informed (Moemeka, 1978). The right to communicate involves not only the exchange of ideas and opinions, and the free flow of all these on a two-way or multi-way basis, but also the provision of communication hardware and infrastructure. Also, it involves the maintenance of an enabling atmosphere in which individuals can take part in communication and utilize the ensuing decisions and conclusions. In fact, the exercise of the right of the people to communicate cannot occur on any appreciable scale without access to the media of mass communication, or on any effective basis without participation in the communication process (Moemeka, 1981: 81).

But access and participation, in the communication market place of Nigeria, are high-class commodities for the rural man, because of (a) our near-total concern for the elite and the urban communities, (b) our general underdevelopment, and (c) the very disabling problems of rural illiteracy, scattered, low-density population, difficult terrain, and poverty.

## MASS MEDIA CHARACTERISTICS

By their nature, the mass media can circumvent the rural problems of illiteracy, scattered population, scarcity of transportation facilities, and shortage of skilled manpower. But they also have their own weaknesses. The television, for example, has the advantage of sight and sound qualities. Not only can the teacher or the animator on the television be seen and heard, but also his demonstrations and examples can be followed readily. Literacy and distance are no barriers to its use. Virtually anything can be taught, demonstrated, and propagated on the television.

The one big handicap of television is its high cost. The overhead and recurrent expenditure for a television station is staggering. This makes effective decentralisation of hardware very difficult. The cost of television sets is also so high that only the well-to-do members of the society can afford them. Hence it has been sarcastically referred to as the "medium of the elite". The restricted ownership means that the cost per person reached by television is very high indeed for the cost of a programme remains the same whether one is producing for 80 people or for 80 million.

The cost factor gives the radio some advantage over television. The radio set is cheap and widely owned. Thus the cost per person reached by radio is generally low. Radio also beats distances and thus has an immediacy effect. It beats literacy barriers, for one does not need to know how to read and write before one can learn from the radio. In addition, radio is individualistic and so has that personal touch which lends urgency of chance. On the other hand, radio is a populist medium thus it enhances the chances of getting messages across to a very wide segment of the population. More importantly, radio is the only modern medium of mass communication with which the rural population is very familiar.

These advantages of the radio all too often make one forget that it, too, has weaknesses. Chief among these is the fact that it is a sound-only medium. One cannot, for example, effectively teach reading and writing on radio. Expressions can only be conjectured from tone variations, and demonstrations are merely verbal and long-drawn. To be successfully used, there has to be an agent at the reception end to provide the missing link.

The newspaper is neither a visual nor an audio medium, but has something of each. Although newspaper materials can be seen, yet they remain meaningless until they have been read and understood. Therefore the ability to read intelligibly is a *sine qua non* in the use of newspapers. This means that the greater percentage of the rural population, which are invariably illiterate, cannot directly learn from the newspaper. It also cannot directly contribute to the construction of newspaper



messages. In addition, unlike radio and television messages which travel through waves, newspaper messages have to be physically carried to the receiver. This involves transportation and distance problems.

However, the newspaper has one big advantage. It has an enduring characteristic. Printed materials can be read and re-read at convenience. They can be stored for future reference. They can be read at a convenient pace without loss of meaning. Because of this the newspaper would appear to be best suited for mass education of illiterate and semi-illiterate populations. In addition, the newspaper is capable of carrying literacy materials or serving as reading materials for new literates, thus ensuring that the people do not only *learn to read* but also *read to learn*.

## MULTI-MEDIA APPROACH

The strengths and weaknesses of the media under review, show the need not to take these media for granted, and not to believe that they are capable of ensuring communication without adequate safeguards against their weaknesses. The enumerated strengths and weaknesses also show that there is need for a wise choice of media for rural development communication.

Recent thinking on the use of the mass media for education and public enlightenment strongly favours a multi-media approach. Two media are generally better than one medium: they ensure more extensive and intensive coverage. In addition, the reconfirmation, in another medium, of a message heard from one medium enhances retention and learning. For example, a breastfeeding campaign, using radio and newspaper, in Trinidad and Tobago, yielded complete awareness on the part of 85% of recently delivered mothers, who eventually delayed the introduction of supplementary bottle-feeding. Again, Tanzania's "Food for Life" campaign through radio and booklet reached three million adults — 50% more than was projected — and produced a drastic reduction in observance of food taboos (Leslie, 1979).

Another reason for a multi-media approach is that, some media are best suited for certain activities than others. Demonstrations are better on television than on radio. Reference and reading materials are better provided by the newspaper than by any of the electronic media. Discussion with rural communities is easier through radio than through the television for obvious reasons. In rural development, therefore, the concern should be not merely determining how to choose the right medium, but rather ascertaining which medium is best suited to what assignment, at what level of operation, and for which audience. Therefore, we suggest that all the three popular media (radio, television, and newspaper) should be used in rural development campaigns.

Whatever media are used, it is imperative that they are not used in isolation. Because the effectiveness of media messages is almost completely dependent on the utilization that takes place at the reception end, the media should be used in combination with inter-personal channels (African Adult Education Association, 1982 : 8). This ensures that the qualities of both the mass media and

interpersonal channels are taken advantage of in the communication endeavour that ensures. See Table 1.

Table 1:  
Main Characteristics of Mass Media,  
Interpersonal Communication, and the Two Channels  
in Combination

Characteristics	Mass Media Channels	Interpersonal Channels	Mass Media Combined with Interpersonal Communication (as in Radio Forum)
1. Direction	One-way	Two-way	Two-way
2. Time to reach a large audience	Rapid	Slow	Rapid
3. Accuracy within large audience	High	Low	High
4. Ability to overcome selective exposure and selective perception	Low	High	High
5. Feedback	Little	Much	Much
6. Ability to answer local needs of the audience	Low	High	High
7. Most likely main effects	Increased knowledge	Attitude change	Increased knowledge and attitude changes

*Data source: Rogers et al. (1977, p. 363).*

## GUIDELINES FOR UTILIZATION

In the light of what has been said about the characteristics of the media, and of the country's rural development, what possibilities are there for making any effective use of the three popular media — radio, television and newspaper — in the task of trying to improve the quality of life of the people? There is the problem of eliciting both moral and financial support for projects. There are the problems of illiteracy, lethargy, apathy, superstition, disease, education, and poverty, to mention a few. Which media are most suited for tackling what problem or problems and how can such media be utilized in such tasks?

### Television

In spite of the scarcity of television sets in the rural areas, the medium should not be left out in the campaign for rural development. Apart from personal set



viewing which is possible with the elite and the urban population, rural community viewing is also possible. This has been found very useful in a number of developing countries like Colombia, India, and Brazil. Even here in Nigeria, three state governments — Kano, Kaduna, and Bendel — experimented with the idea. Unfortunately, they abandoned the idea shortly after they were launched, not because they were found unproductive (for they were really productive) but because of “financial and technical problems.”

If adequate financial and technical arrangements are made, viewing centres can prove a viable tool in the effort to achieve rural emancipation. This is a point for the Federal government to note in its present effort to set up viewing centres all over the country. The government should vote sufficient funds for both programming and maintenance. Adequate arrangement should also be made for supervision and for competent *itinerant* operational and technical staff to be stationed at Local Government Headquarters. In addition, the *relevance* problem of specificity of programme materials and the *physical participation* problem of discussion after viewing should be given special attention.

## Newspapers

Newspapers are generally regular in supply and carry current and varied information on cultural, social, economic, and political activities. The permanence which the printed word guarantees makes the newspaper a suitable medium for development communication. However, strong arguments have been adduced against this medium, especially in rural development activities. Perhaps, the strongest of these points is the fact that the newspaper is a literate medium while the rural population is basically illiterate. It has also been argued that even if the rural population is literate enough to read and understand newspaper content, the problems of cost and distribution, as well as the urban-elite orientation of the papers will not make the newspaper a satisfactory medium for rural development communication.

However, rural development is not just a rural area problem but a national one. Therefore, urban and educated-elite support is imperative for a successful rural development effort. And like the television, the newspaper is a necessary medium for eliciting this support.

The type of newspapers envisaged here should be amenable to rural conditions. Such newspapers come under what is now known as the Rural Press (Hein, 1979: 10), which is dedicated to the production of rural mimeos and/or newspapers basically for the rural population. Produced and printed by the rural people themselves under guidance, they have proved successful in literacy campaigns and in the adoption of new and improved agricultural and health practices in a number of African countries, chiefly Tanzania, Togo, Liberia, and Senegal. They highlight rural problems. Cheap to produce, they do not suffer distribution problems because they are locally produced. Equally important, they help to inculcate literacy, for they serve as cheap and readily available reading materials for new literates.

The basic equipment of the rural press is the Silk Screen Duplicator, which costs only about N40 to produce. It can have the village school as the centre of production and the Local Government Headquarters as a larger centre for support and co-ordination. Apart from circulating within its village of origin, each paper can also circulate among adjoining villages to ensure comparative analysis of development activities and encourage healthy competition.

### Radio:

This is the one medium which almost all experts agree is best suited for rural emancipation. This near-total confidence on the medium does not, of course, lose sight of the fact that the radio is a sound-only medium. Its advantages (low cost, familiarity, availability, and so on) far outweigh the lack-of-sight disadvantage. In addition, this disadvantage has been circumvented by the introduction of organized listening with an agent at the reception end to provide the missing link. It is precisely because of this fact that the Radio Schools of Colombia and the Radio Study Groups of Tanzania were organized. It was recognized that, to be effective in education, public enlightenment, and in communication generally, as opposed to mere information, the radio needs an intermediary between it and its target audience.

If this medium must be used in support communication for improving the quality of life in rural Nigeria (and it is strongly recommended) it is important to begin right from the initial stages of planning to think seriously of what type of arrangement to make for the reception end. There has to be a proper organization to facilitate participation and discussion. Allied to this issue of organized listening and discussion is the issue of access to radio stations and participation in programme planning and production. The effectiveness of radio when people have access to stations and participate in programming and programme production is far greater than when the audience just sits and listens to programmes planned and produced by distant producers.

Table 2 shows that the radio strategies which produce all-round effectiveness are the learning groups strategies, that is, Radio Schools, Radio Rural Forums, Radio Animation, and Instructional Radio. It is safe to assume that the main reason why these strategies perform better than Open Broadcasting is the involvement of the target audience in their operation and their reliance on other factors in addition to radio.



Table 2:

# Goals and Strategies of Radio for Development Effectiveness and Reach

## Effectiveness in Reaching Stated Goals

### To Teach Nonformal Education

Radio Strategies	Reach	To Motivate	To Inform	Cognitive Skills	Work Skills	To Change Behaviour
Open Broadcasting	High	4	5	1	1	2
Radio Campaigns	High	5	2	2	1	3
Learning Groups	Medium	4	3	3	2	4
Telecommunications (Two-way Radio)	Low	5	4	2	1	2

Note: A value of 1 indicates low effectiveness  
A value of 5 indicates high effectiveness.

Data source: Jamison and McAnany (1978, p.137).

It is true that since the emergence of the transistor, radio set ownership has become very widespread. But ownership of radio sets only assures effectedness of messages, that is that a message from a source has been received. This is a necessary first step to, but almost a far cry from, effectiveness of the message, that is, that the message from the source has been received, understood, accepted and is to be complied with. This condition obtains only when the source takes the receiver and his situation into account, that is, (a) when the socioeconomic and environmental conditions of the receiver are taken into consideration in the construction of the message, (b) when the message is relevant to and has value for the receiver, and (c) when the source is seen not as a distant teacher but as an understanding animator who has entered into the cultural context of the receiver. It is usually not possible to meet these criteria from urban-centred radio stations. Hence, the need to establish radio stations in as many rural regions as possible.

## CONCLUSION

The mass media are very impersonal. To make them effective in rural development they have to be mediated by interpersonal channels of communication. But such mediation will not be effective unless it is constantly reinforced and the individuals engaged in it are constantly fed with relevant information. These conditions are hard to meet unless the mass media are effectively decentralised to ensure maximum use of local materials and full cognisance of local conditions. Each of the three best known media - radio,

television, and newspaper - can be decentralised to the rural areas and made a veritable channel for the development communication required to improve the quality of life of rural inhabitants.

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