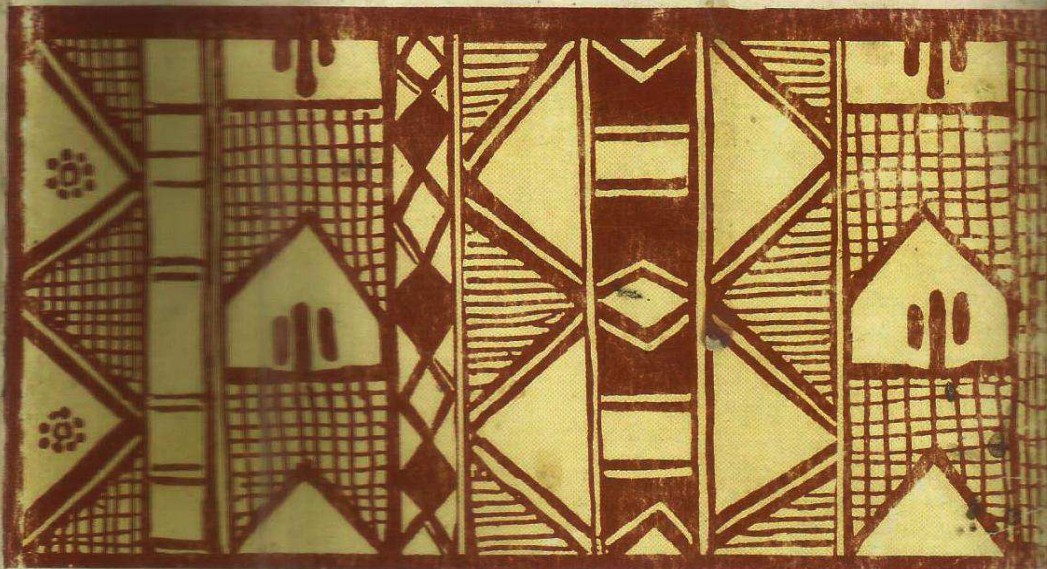


AFRICAN Journalism

in PERSPECTIVE



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CHAPTER 22

THE MASS MEDIA AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

By des Wilson

**There is
a lot to
be done
here**

The mass media include books, newspapers, magazines as well as radio television and other facilitators such as satellite and printing machinery. It is estimated that between 70-80 per cent of Nigerians live in rural areas. Sometimes rural areas are vaguely defined in terms of population and non-availability of indices of modern society such as electricity and pipe-borne water. However, the rural status is continuously changing. It is possible for a previously urban society to become a rural one as a result of changes in facilities.

DEVELOPMENT

Development is what society thinks make its people live richer and better lives. African communication scholars agree that development is measured in the improvement in the lives of the people and the strengthening of the family's or the individual's capacity to deal with the rest of society and of the nation's capacity to deal with the world.

Information in Development

Schramm (1964) discussed the role of information in development, the distribution of the mass media in the world and the use of mass media in information and literacy campaigns.

LIMITATIONS OF THE MASS MEDIA

Deep-rooted attitudes cannot be easily changed by mere expo-

sure to the media alone. Media scholars seem to agree that to be genuinely effective, the broadcast media should be reinforced by word of mouth, or by campaigns of personal intervention, literacy corps, health officers and agricultural extension agents.

Without clearly determining the needs of the rural people it is unwise to impose on them any set of objects which are irrelevant in their cultural setting. Similarly any rural development programme which excludes the ruralites in the conceptualization and planning stages only to seek their support at the implementation stage is likely to fail. In support of this view the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) (1978) states that the process of integrated rural development requires the interaction of people, institutions and governments at all levels, and its success depends on the degree of involvement of the generality of the people who are to benefit from it.

RURAL INFORMATION NEEDS

The mass media, in spite of their limitations can be used to promote rural development. The needs of rural society must be clearly defined. It has been ascertained that rural societies need information on issues such as health, agriculture, employment, education, family and community matters. They need information on such issues for survival and for solving their problems.

Most importantly, the mass media have been widely used in agricultural, mass literacy, health, and political campaigns in Nigeria. Such campaigns include Operation Food First, Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) and Oral Dehydration Therapy (ORT).

Other programmes based on ideological re-orientation include, War Against Indiscipline, National Orientation Movement, and Mass Mobilization for Social Justice, Economic Recovery and Self-Reliance (MAMSER). In recent times, there have been many government-sponsored campaigns. These campaigns have achieved relative success in areas which coincide with the general interest of the society. The executors of these campaigns have used various forms of modern mass media more than traditional media and channel of communications.

MEDIA AS AGENTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

One of the most effective channels employed by development officers is the radio because it is relatively cheap and accessible to many rural people. Broadcasting serves as an agent of social change. Kingsley Esin (1986) states that in rural areas, television and radio have clearly established themselves as powerful forces of transformation. Other media scholars state that traditional forms of communication though not often acknowledged are also powerful forces of transformation. The influence of traditional systems has given expression to such developmental concepts as "integrated rural development." This is a euphemism for the use of traditional and modern communication systems for industrial, social and economic development.

ROLE OF THE MASS MEDIA IN DEVELOPMENT

Mass media have been widely used in agricultural, mass literacy, health, and political campaigns. These usage can be examined under the following broad communication principles: communication for self-actualization, mobilization, education, liberation and development.

INFORMATION FOR SELF-ACTUALIZATION

This includes the communication needs in regards to health, employment, novelty and mysteries, recreation and cultural matters.

Rural societies are often exposed to a number of health hazards about which information is often needed. Aboyade (1987) discussed these needs under four broad categories- increased productivity and income growth, rural non-farm economic activities, social amenities, social participation and political involvement.

Some of the most pervasive of such campaigns in recent times are Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) and the Oral Dehydration Therapy (ORT). They would have been more effective if the origins and causes of ailments were explained to the public.

In addition, such campaigns should highlight the major health hazards and provide strategies for ameliorating the social conditions of the rural people. In other words the problems and possible solutions should be presented in easily understood terms and forms.

INFORMATION FOR MOBILIZATION

The need for social, political or economic mobilization is one major factor in rural development. For mobilization to take place there must be a certain level of information available to meet the needs of the citizens in the society.

INFORMATION FOR EDUCATION

Communication aimed at educating the ruralites on scientific discoveries, new technologies, improved crop varieties, healthcare and family planning can bring about progress in the society.

INFORMATION FOR LIBERATION

The purpose of such information is to free the mind from fear, and to let receivers know their social and political rights thereby protecting their freedom. It is such information which gives meaning to the independence of the individual and the society.

INFORMATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

It is the most important of all the information needs of the individual and society. Rural people often require information on general agriculture, how best to utilise available land for food production, and on ways and means of getting financial assistance. To help solve some of these problems, they form cooperative societies. But these societies have their limitations.

On land, agriculture and food, Aboyade (1987) states that, farmers need to have information on specific supplies required on their farms. They will need to know where, when, and how to obtain fertilizer, pesticides, seeds, equipment through purchase or hiring. They will need to know the prices, and the names of suppliers. In rural areas, availability of land is increasingly becoming a problem. The land tenure system does not allow for easy acquisition of land by the landless poor except through some form of indenture (pledging, out-right sale or exchange).

CONCLUSION

Information from the media should have direct relevance to the problems of rural people. Media representations should serve as attention-directing devices or signals to further action.

The approach to rural development is embedded in a Chinese slogan that says - *Go to the people; Live among them; Love them; Plan with them; Start with what they know, and build on what they have.*

This means that for the mass media to meet the needs of the people, they must not be necessarily modelled along traditional western lines. In other words, the managers of media or mass communication in developing countries should try to understand the social and economic conditions of the society, identify the information needs of the people and utilize message facilitators such as community viewing centres, wall news-papers, notices, and traditional channels to achieve the desired development in the rural areas.

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