NDỤÑỌDE

Calabar Journal of the Humanities

6

The Need for the Establishment of Comunity Radio in Northern Cross River State: The Language Perspective

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Abstract

This work acknowledges the critical importance of the establishment of community radio in the northern part of Cross River State. It goes on to illustrate the importance of indigenous languages as the vehicles for communication in the community radio in order to ensure easy and active participation of the people. An earlier work carried out by (Esara 2008), had revealed that there is very poor or no reception from the only state owned radio station in the northern part of the Cross River State thereby hampering participatory development. This paper highlights the role of the rural community in engendering participatory development between the government and the people. What a community radio is, its structure and how it can bring about development as it pertains to the grassroots is also elaborated. The research methodology for this work is observation and unstructured interview. Considering the importance and positive effects of the community radio, the crusade for its emergence is therefore really pertinent if the Millennium Development Goals are to be achieved

Introduction

In all domains of life, it could be seen that language plays very important roles. Language may be seen as a system of

communication that enables humans to cooperate and interact. Without language, no meaningful development can be achieved in the society. Language has maintained its major role which is communication. Language has remained a relevant tool in the achievement of national development, integration and unity. Amuseghan (2010:1) opines that "language and communication have been identified as indispensable instruments of achieving aims, goals, objectives and development". By this assertion, it could be argued that nothing much can be achieved without language and communication.

This paper advocates for the use of indigenous for languages and the need for the establishment of a community radio in the Northern part of Cross River State. This is necessary because according to Okon (2008:64), there are about thirty-seven languages and a network of dialects in Cross River State. Therefore, there is a need for a community radio in the northern part of Cross River State with the use of indigenous languages as the medium of transmission in order to enable the rural people to understand, participate and benefit from the activities of government. This is because the only radio station is in Calabar, the State capital with a booster station at Ikom, and its programmes are run mostly in English language. Besides, it is not easily received in the northern part of the state. Since the community radio would use indigenous languages, communication will be easier and thereby enhance the participation the rural populace's, and also ensure that the people benefit from the development programmes and plans.

Objectives:
- To find out if there is a need for a community radio.
- To advocate for the establishment of a community radio.
- To engender the use of the language of the immediate environment as agent of development.
- To sensitize the rural people to participate in development plans. To achieve these, there is a need for a theoretical framework as discussed below.

Theoretical framework
Development Communication

According to Udoakah (1998:5-6)"…early technological development information about the world has come to be controlled by the international News Agencies of the West, namely: Reuters, Associated Press, United Press International and Agence France Press". Development communication therefore is a remonstrance against western domination of the world information market. It is a new philosophy for the use of modern media of mass information in the developing countries. This definition is debatable because it leaves out traditional media of communication which is very vital to development. The researcher would rather agree with the definition given by Graser and Restrepo-Estrada (1998) in Ajibade (2003:2) as:

> The use of communication process, techniques and media to help people towards a full awareness of their situation and their opinions for change, to resolve conflicts, to work towards consensus, to help people plan actions for change and sustainable development, to help people acquire the knowledge and skills they need to improve their condition and that of society, and to improve the effectiveness of institutions.

From the definition above, the use of communication process and techniques could mean the right ways and measures to reach the populace with vital information. One of such is language as a means of communication. Language here plays a very vital role because most of the rural people only understand their local language so the best way of reaching them is through the use of the language of the immediate community. When the indigenous language is used, it is easier to create awareness and sensitize the people on issues around them. The basic goal of development communication is to create the understanding of the issues involved in a development programme, and create an avenue for exchange of ideas, discussions and dialogue.

Development Media Theory

This theory seeks to explain the normative behaviour of the press in countries that are conventionally classified as "developing" or "third world countries". In this ideology, the media is mobilized to serve national goals in economic and social development. Information is considered a scarce natural resource and must be carefully managed by the government to achieve national goals. Some of the goals the media are expected to help achieve include political integration, literacy, economic self-sufficiency and the eradication of disease hence, the need for the establishment of a community radio (Dominick: 2002, Tiamiyu: 2003, and Folarin:2005). The relevance of this theory to this work is the recognition given to local languages in developmental task promotion. It is so important because it is integrated in how the radio uses the local languages to air developmental tasks and issues.

Centrality of Indigenous Language in the Establishment of Community Radio

" It is important to note that language does not exist independent of culture, that is, it is the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives" (Bamidele:1999 as cited by Oyero 2003:187). Though there exist other means of communication, language still remains a peculiar endowment of man that makes him unique among other living creatures. A person's indigenous language or the mother tongue is a part and carrier of his culture, as well as his means of communication. To Chibita (2006:253) "Determining what languages may be used in the media and how, can be a powerful tool of control and a way to enhance the participation of some members of society while limiting that of others". This is so because of the centrality of language to the thinking and expression of a people. This does not augur well with every member of the society because development as construed here is for all and the language choice must consider all.

Wallace (1996) as cited by Oyero (2003:189), emphasizes the point

that "native language, when used in the media, for example in *community radio*, writing or in the arts is powerful in bringing about changes in the lives of people". This is so especially as we are advocating the establishment of the rural community 'radio in Northern Cross River State. Several other scholars have called attention to the importance of indigenous language in mobilization for development. Adekunle (1995) cited in Oyero (2003:189) asserts that "indigenous languages can be used to raise the standards of living in the rural areas by using them in adult education programmes to teach basic technology".

In addition to the above views, according to Essien (2003:33),"…it seems clear that the language of development is the mother tongue or a language(s) rooted in the people's culture and tradition, a language in which the generality of the nation's populace have unimpeded and unconscious facility in all forms of communication".

Finally, Folarin and Mohammed (1996) as cited by Oyero (2003) have also called attention to the fact that indigenous language press can be a veritable instrument in mobilizing the vast majority, who are unlettered in the English language. to be involved in the political process. Hence, the need for the establishment of a rural community radio in Northern Cross River State which will definitely emphasize the use of the indigenous language for the development of the majority in that area who are mostly farmers.

Communication as a Driving Force of Development

According to Soola (2003:13) who cites Oladapo (1996)
Development is a process of economic and social advancement which enables people to realize their potentials, build self-confidence and lead lives of dignity and fulfillment. It is a process aimed at freeing people from evils of want, ignorance, social injustice and economic exploitation.

It could be seen in Nigeria that the core aim of every administration's programmes bothers on development of the citizenry and the country; that is why the subject of development is of great importance. In order to bring about this development, however, the beneficiaries of the development plans should be active participants and not passive about the development plans which will be achieved through the establishment of a community radio that makes use of the indigenous language.
From the viewpoint of UNICEF:

> A time will come when the progress of a nation will be judged not by their political might economic strength or the splendor of their capital cities and public buildings but by the well being of their people, the level of their health, nutrition, education, their opportunities to earn a fair ability to participate in decisions that affect their lives, the respect that is shown for their civil and political liberties, the provisions that are made for those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged.

(Cited by Aluko 2007:1)

If a progressing nation is to be adjudged by the above factors, which level has Nigeria attained? Akinyele (2011) asserts that above 70% of Nigerians live in the rural areas. Since it is in the rural areas that development is greatly needed, a community radio as an agent of communication/ participation is desirable.

The first aim of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is that of eradicating extreme poverty by the year 2015. In a bid to do this, the Nigerian Government has in the past established various projects, programmes and agencies such as the National Fadama Project to ensure food security, the Village/Community Enhancement Scheme, the National Poverty Alleviation Agency (NAPEP), National Economic Empowerment Strategy (NEEDS), the Seven Point Agenda, etc. The introduction of these measures is commendable. However, the effectiveness and impact of these agencies and programmes on the Nigerian masses especially the

rural poor is questionable.

In order to reduce poverty in the rural areas, the government at all levels needs to provide farmers with incentives such as fertilizers at subsidized rate, improved irrigation system and hybrid seeds so as to increase agricultural output. The development should however not be focused on agriculture alone. Concerted efforts should be made to improve the level of education and health care delivery with emphasis on preventable diseases like malaria, tuberculosis and reproductive health related illness. Every sector that affects live in the rural areas should be developed in order to strengthen the capacity and capability of the inhabitants and to empower the youths. Rural development is all about improving the standard of living of the low income population living in the rural areas so as to be self sustained. This can be achieved through the use of indigenous language which is the main language in the community radio.

In a bid to empower and sustain the rural populace, information must be made available to them. The existing media have played great roles in the dissemination of information, but have been found deficient in some specific areas which have slowed down the pace of development in the rural areas. The government also has made efforts in development however, its ability to address individual community needs and concerns through these stations are limited. Certain problems are peculiar to different communities. Such problems cannot be adequately addressed through radio and television stations located in cities but by a community radio that uses the language of the immediate environment. Therefore, this paper advocates the need for community radio in the northern part of Cross River State.

History of the Radio

Historically, radio broadcasting in Nigeria dates back to 1932. It was established by the British for their use and the language of use was the English language. However, in 1957 the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation was established as an Independent Institution designed to be neutral of existing political

forces on ground. In practice. that dream was never realized; it was more of semantics, implementation was a different thing as operated by the then policy makers. Section 36 (2) of the 1979 constitution ushered in a revolution in radio broadcasting in the country by proclaiming that "the federal and state government or any other person or body authorized by the president can own, establish or operate a television or wireless broadcasting station in the country". It gave statutory mandate to the ultimate emergence of private/commercial radio broadcasting 13 years after. In 1992, the then government of Ibrahim Babangida through the creation of the National Broadcasting Commission, decreed into existence a new era for private broadcasting. The emergence of private/commercial radio broadcasting has greatly helped in development, but more has to be done since Nigeria is the only West African country without a community radio (Weekly Trust Online).

Community Radio

Community radio, as defined in the African Charter on Broadcasting, is "the broadcasting which is for, by and about the community, whose ownership and management is representative of the community, which pursues a social development agenda and which is non-profit". Also, according to Wikipedia free Encyclopedia,
"Community radio is a type of radio service that offers a third model of radio broadcasting beyond commercial and public service". This type of radio could also be seen as a radio owned and operated by a community or members of a community which considers most importantly the language of the speech community as well as the competence of the people in that language. Since it is the indigenous language in which the people are born into, it will provide the zeal for the community to contribute and maximally benefit from its programmes

The Roles of Community Radio

The radio is the most effective tool of mass

communication today in Africa and in Third World Countries generally. It is one of the oldest mass communication devices that is still in use. Surprisingly, the radio is the only mass communication medium which has received more popularity after the advent of the internet. Ojebode (2003:93) states that "classification of the functions of mass media along the tripartite axis of information, education and entertainment (and sometimes surveillance) seems to lump up so many distinct and significant functions of the media to the effect that they become little known and underplayed". Therefore, an attempt to examine its development roles beyond the aforementioned tripartite axis.

Folarin (1990) in Oyero (2003:190) notes that "radio messages, apart from breaking the barrier of illiteracy, reach all people without discrimination and demands less intellectual exertion from the listeners than print media". In addition, Ojebode (2003) highlights some roles of radio in development to include information dispersing and the enlightenment role. Radio disseminates information to people about health, agriculture, education, economy and road safety among other issues.

Closely related to this is the fact that the radio broadens the mental horizon of listeners. Through its news dissemination and education radio "transports" people from their obscure corners of the world to anywhere anything considered newsworthy is taking place through the use of language. This is a very important role because a widening circumference of experience is an index of ongoing personal development. In addition, radio mobilizes people to support government decisions and programmes. Ojebode (2003:94) also notes that in Nigeria, Radio Kaduna, through its prorgamme *Don Makiyaya, a Kuya*, a programme in indigenous language successfully mobilizes the hitherto intractable nomads to partake in nomadic education. Hence, the need to establish a community radio in Northern Cross River State which will use the indigenous languages.

In times of crises, radio can become the glue that holds a nation together. For instance, in 1912, when the Titanic sank, the radio was there to console the bereaved and announce the names of

the 700 survivors to their panic stricken relatives. It could also be remembered that during ·the just concluded April 2011 polls in Nigeria, the radio played a vital role. All federal radio stations in the country including Atlantic FM in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State and Cross River Broadcasting Corporation (CRBC) in Cross River State ran continuously for hours to keep people informed about what was going on during the elections but people in the rural areas could not benefit from this service because the extent of reception as well as the language of choice prevented them.

In some cases, the radio helps to engender the evolution of a bottom- up agenda setting. This is particularly ,seen in the community radio station which is the reason one is being advocated for in this write-up. People use the radio to reach out to other communities and the government. In this light, let us look at the specific roles of community radio.

The community radio provides communities with locally produced programmes that are immediately relevant to their daily lives. It allows individuals and community groups to participate in producing their own programmes and to maintain their local culture which can be achieved through the use of the language of the immediate environment. According to Alliance de radio, "community radio stations are the best standard–bearers of our culture. Its airwaves reflect the cultural reality – songs, music, writing of the population it serves". This is so achieved because these programmes are transmitted through the indigenous language of the people. Is not the most meaningful definition of culture; the act of making people aware of the greatness they possess? That is exactly what the community radio does. It projects and promotes the culture of the people and language which is the pendulum in which culture rotates and serves as a bridge for the appreciation of these projects.

Advocacy for Community Radio

The need for the establishment of community radio in the northern part of Cross River State is very important and the major reasons are highlighted in the points below.

Language

The existing radio station is urban based and most times employs the language of the urban elite in presenting programmes when in reality, the rural dwellers are not able to decode these messages. For any meaningful development to take place and for people's lives to be touched positively, the people must understand the projects that are carried out and their benefits for them as members of the society. The community radio is the only radio that is able to address this problem because the language of the community is used as the medium of transmission.

The station will use the local language to present discussion programmes on the projects initiated and create environmental awareness in order to encourage feedback form the community thus minimizing the unidirectional flow of information that is at times common to the urban based radio stations. It cuts across the language and literacy barrier since it uses the local language. It allows the participants to contribute meaningfully. According to Mano (2006:271), "Only by broadcasting in languages that are familiar to its listeners can African radio lay claim to the important function of providing a forum in which all citizens can express their national concerns and communal interests thereby develop the people and the community".

Location

In Nigeria today, "there are 82 AM radio, 35FM stations and II short wave stations". Nigeria Press, Media, TV, Radio Newspaper Press Reference. Out of these numbers of radio stations, only one station is located in Cross River State. As a result, the signal of this radio station is poorly received in the rural parts of northern Cross River State. This is because the station is urban centric (i.e situated in the state capital).

The rural people in northern Cross River State, who are predominantly farmers, want to know what is happening in their environment, the new agricultural inputs, outputs and directives and the state of the country at large. That is why the call for the establishment of community radio in this part of the state is really

pertinent, because according to Stephen 1987 in Aluko (2007:7) "without communication man will be forced to live in isolation". Communication must be in a language that is understood by the people involved in the discourse. Therefore, a community radio should certainly make use of the local language of the environment.

Ownership and Control

The urban-based radio stations are being controlled by the government and the elite who do not know much about the problems of the rural people and that is why most programmes aired are urban- centred through the choice of languages that are exocentric without the consideration for the non-elite. In community radio, the ownership and control lies with the community and it is governed by a board that reflects the diversity of the community, defines its missions, set policies and oversees finance while being responsive to the needs of the community. It is therefore very important that a rural community radio be established in this part of the State.

Participation

Participation could be described as the involvement of people in given issues and projects in a way that goals are set and objectives may be better achieved. The local people, when involved at every step of building a station become stakeholders of the project as it promises participation while giving them hope to become beneficiaries of the novel programme. Community radio better informs the people and thereby encourages them to be part of the programmes and initiatives that are introduced. They are also involved in programme presentations and planning because of the choice of indigenous language.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

The saying that a person that is not informed is deformed is true because information dissemination is an integral part of development. The existing media, both print and electronic, allow for the dissemination of information but there are some barriers

such as the choice of language, illiteracy, socio-cultural differences, geographical distances, poverty and so forth. In this case, it is only the community radio that can help to bridge this gap.

Considering the distance of the northern part of Cross River State from Calabar which is the state capital and the poor quality of signal from the radio station, community radio is really needed there. It will empower the local communities, strengthen their economy base and address their needs because it will not only involve the people but will use a language that is theirs. It will also facilitate circulation of ideas and provide a necessary platform for information, education on farming methods and so forth. The merits of community radio cannot be exhausted, therefore if the government is interested in development; it should appreciate the need for community radio in this area and work towards achieving it soonest.

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