**COMMUNITY JOURNALISM AND THE CHALLENGES OF RURAL REPORTING IN NIGERIA**

**ABSTRACT**

Rural communities in Nigeria have largely been relegated to the periphery of the regular mainstream socio-economic and political development conversations. Their voices remain muted and their core political and socio-economic concerns largely excluded from the core resource planning and allocation. Newspaper offers a platform for remedying this situation as it is widely regarded as the ideal media for developmental communication (Butner, 2003), particularly for rural populations. This study set out to examine the role of Community journalism and challenges of rural reporting in Nigeria. Afemai newspaper, a community radio station located in Afemai , Edo state was selected for a case study with the purpose of demonstrating the role of community journalism in rural development of Afemai. This study was qualitative in orientation and data were as gathered through focus group discussions, key informant interviews and direct observation in addition to consulting secondary data from various sources. The findings of this study are that Afemai newspaper is indeed being harnessed for the social, economic, cultural and political development of the inhabitants of Afemai in such areas as mobilization of resources and collective action, preservation and promotion of progressive facets of local culture, civic education, behaviour modification, business and social networking, as well as promotion of fraternity and harmony in the community. Existing community media houses on their part should develop effective sustainability systems to enable them thrive. Such would include better community participation and support, volunteerism, partnership with devolved government units, and creative fundraising initiatives.

**CHAPTER ONE**

**INTRODUCTION**

**1.1 Background of the Study**

 Community journalism is a staggering concept viewed from the perspective of its application in the Nigeria’s context. Looking at the issue from the standpoint of community radio, historical development of broadcasting in Nigeria reveals that community/local/ rural radio was never taken into consideration as an integral part of it up till now, the situation has persisted, because no where in Nigeria is the phenomenon of community radio currently being felt. So far the location of broadcasting stations has remained in the same pattern established by successive Nigeria government in the concentration of infrastructure which favours the urban centre to the neglect of rural areas.

 Until April 21, 2009, when a clarion call was made on the inevitability and desirability of community broadcasting in Nigeria through a one- day policy dialogue on the matter in Abuja by stakeholders, broadcasting in Nigeria was urban conceived and urban delivered in all its ramification. As opposed to other countries in Africa where community broadcasting has been embraced, Nigeria in just a toddler in rural broadcasting. Apart from some campus radio stations been run by some higher institutions in the country which have some nuances of community broadcasting, there is virtually nothing concrete on ground beyond rhetorics and policy framework. Ajijola quoted in Moemeka (2008,p.7) puts the number of community radio stations in some countries in Africa as follows; Mali, 120, Senegal 44, Burkina Faso 27, Niger Republic 24, Republic of Benin 22 and Ghana 8. Furthermore, Quarmyne cited by Konkwo (2010,p.98) states that South Africa has 92 community radio stations while Mozambique boasts of 25.

In Ghana for instance, the role of community radio has been clearly stated in their 1995 legislation. According to Alumuku (2006,p.17) Ghana’s legislation “stipulates that community broadcasting should be non- sectarian, non-partisan and not-for-profit but add that commercial advertising is permissible on community broadcasting stations for the purposes of sustainability …” He added: the legislation points out that at least 70% of programmes on all community broadcasting stations should be in local languages and 80% of the programmes should be produced by the station itself. At least 20% of programmes should be of national interest, which could include relays of national broadcast news from the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC).

In Zambia, the National Broadcasting (Licensing) Regulations Act of 1993 from a legal back up for establishment of community radio. It is an independent authority with the powers to licence, regulate and allocate frequencies as an essential element to liberalization process (Alumuku, 2008).

Equally in South Africa, the promulgation of the Independence Broadcasting Authority (IBA) Act of 1993 as pontificated by Alumuku (2008, p 17) “paved the way for the licensing of community radio stations and the government’s white paper on broadcasting published in June 2001 outlined the government’s first ever policy on community radio.”While the blames of ex-communicating the rural populace in Nigeria through community broadcasting lies squarely on government, some experts believe that journalism educators and mass communication researchers should also be held responsible for their negligence in promoting community broadcasting. Konkwo (2010) and Claussen (2008).While Konkwo (2010) specifically accused Africa Journalism educators for partly been responsible what he described as “cheerless situation” Claussen (2008) bemoaned the fact that journalism educators and mass communication researchers in Africa are almost ignoring community radio (which is) increasingly important worldwide.

 The mass media are technologically driven. Technology has changed the tide of news reporting in our society. Ate (2008, p. 73) confirms this assertion with particular emphasis on satellite: As the society becomes more complex by the day, media practitioners need to technologically position themselves in a vantage position to effectively perform their social responsibility function to members of the public. In those days, somebody could accept the definition of news as an account of what has happened. And for any event to be defined as new, it must be reported. But today, with the technology of satellite, the process of news gathering and dissemination has been re-shaped. People can watch events anywhere in the world as they are happening. He further argued that technology is an aspect of culture and that the nature of society depends largely on the type of technology it acquired.

**1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Community journalism play a special role in giving a voice to rural and/or marginalized and poor communities and those without access to mainstream media, and often deliver content that is part of a development agenda. The financial sustainability of rural reporting is often a major challenge to community journalism. In Nigeria and indeed other third world countries, the people living in rural areas are neglected in terms of information dissemination and development process. This has created attractions to urban areas. There is high rate of ignorance in the rural areas, beyond the poor physical development of such areas. The problem necessitating this study is therefore: what are the challenges of rural reporting in Nigeria.

**1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this are to:

i. Examine the role of community journalism in rural development.

ii. Examine the effectiveness of these channels of communication.

iii. Examine the attitude and perception of rural dwellers to community journalism.

iv. Examine the challenges of rural reporting in Nigeria.

**1.4 Research Questions**

Based on the objectives of the study, the following questions were addressed in the study.

i. What is the role of community journalism in rural development?

ii. How effective are these channels of communication?

iii. What are the attitude and perception of rural dwellers to community journalism?

iv. What are the challenges of rural reporting in Nigeria?

**1.5 Significance of the Study**

There is no doubt about the fact that work like this will be beneficiary to some set of people and entity. Meanwhile, this work will benefit the following people, the rural dwellers, government and future researchers. The rural dwellers will see community journalism as an effective tool in their domain as a weapon in their struggle for good health status, enhanced working and living conditions, political and human rights etc. Government at all levels will see reasons for improving the wellbeing of rural inorder to attain national development. Researchers who will be exploring on this or related Research will find the work interesting and as a reference point.

**1.6 The Scope of the Study**

 This research work is term to examine the community journalism and the challenges of rural reporting in Nigeria a study of Afemai Newspaper.

**CHAPTER TWO**

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Amodu (2007) cited in Anaeto (2010: p. 4) in examining development, says that it is the process of positive socio-economic change in the quality and level of human existence which is aimed at raising the standard of living, the quality of life and human dignity. Focusing on social needs, self-reliance and people‟s participation, Sanda (1992: p.107) defines development as being conceived as “multi-dimensional referring to positive changes which affect the majority and which lie in the social, economic, political and cultural spheres of societal life…Development entails social progress in both economic and non-economic components of societal life.” Inayatullah (1967) as cited by Jimoh (2008: p. 105) defines development as the ability of man to have greater control over his environment and increased realization of its human values, its political destiny and self discipline. Here, he emphasizes human indices as better management and control of the environment, including the need for good political system of governance which is acceptable to all. This is the realm of sustainable development. That is, developing without destroying the environment. Inayatullah also emphasized the endogenous path to development through the participatory approach. This will help in sustaining the values of the people.

Participation by the people for development programs and policies is a major impetus for development. Similarly, in a precise but all encompassing definition of development, the duo of Melkote and Steeves (2001:45) simply define development as “the process by which societal conditioning are improved.” Development is also understood on the basis of a renewed thinking on sustainable development “as the increasing capacity of man to manipulate his environment to his betterment.” (Jimoh, 2005: p.1) All efforts both physical and social including policies and programs geared towards a better life for the people excluding politics and political activities will be seen as development oriented. Better life is seen in line with Sears‟ (1977:

p. 124) conceptualization of development as:

the questions to ask about a country‟s development are therefore; what has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result „development‟ even if per capita income doubled.

Clearly, Sears contention is that social indices of reduction in poverty, unemployment and inequality are better yardsticks for measuring the development status of a nation. Reason being that high economic indices do not translate to better life and sometimes may worsen it as the state of inequality may increase. In the same vein, Young (1993) cited in Lanihun in Soola (2002: p. 75) avers that: “development implies a change for the better: the ordering of society and social and economic processes in such a way as to lead to the eradication of gross poverty, ill-health, and illiteracy and to rising standards of living and increased material comforts for all.”

These additional human indices of good health, improved literacy levels to eradication of poverty, unemployment and inequality constitute this study‟s understanding of development. Indeed even the millennium development goals of eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowerment of women; reduction of child mortality; improvement of maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing global partnership (Millennium Development Goals Report 2004) are rooted in these indicators of development. Oso and Adebayo(1990: p. VIII) assert that “within the context of promoting development, and in this instance rural development, information dissemination assumes a specific role, that of mediating to promote development.” The media are to play a major and direct role as magic multiplier of both the diffusion process and the resultant development benefits.

In the struggle for national development, according to Moemeka (1990: p. 72),

The uneducated and impoverished rural majority cannot be left out without devastating consequences. In the effort to enlist their contribution, the mass media cannot be ignored, and in the attempt to use these media of mass communication to liberate, enlighten and educate rural people for development, the strategy should be one which gives priority to the aims of not mere information distribution and transmission but of participation, expression and communication.

According to Oso, Mass media are the great teachers and mobilizer for change. They are to mobilize human resources by substituting new norms and values, attitudes and behavior for existing new ones in order to stimulate the rural dwellers to increase their productivity and its the value that support this ideology of hard work that…In a broad sense, the mass media serve to maintain and perpetuate the prevailing ideology.

Communication plays a vital role in development. This assertion was made by Harrison (p. 4), “the spread of the mass media has been among the most powerful forces for social change in developing as well as in developed countries. The media have broadened narrow horizons, accelerated the pace of transformation and created a climatic readiness for development.” In Africa, mass media contents are generally dominated by political and other non-development oriented reports. Barton (1979) found that the content of the press was largely on political matters with little attention paid to the development needs of Africa. He argued that this may be due to the fact that the press of Africa was founded on the basis of nationalism and politics. Barton‟s work though comprehensive is limited in context and time. The study was conducted in 1970s when Nigeria was under military era, which may have affected press coverage of development matters. Malam (2005) found in a content analysis study of five newspapers including Gaskiya Tafi Kwabo, that:

Irrespective of such factors as ownership, scope of circulation and head office location, all the papers separately and collectively had an average of 85% of their stories focused on urban oriented activities; 6% rural and 8% both (e.g. elections or natural disasters).

**Newspaper and Rural Development**

Based on this understanding of development, some nations are developed while others are not. The high level of poverty, unemployment, poor health conditions, inequality between the haves and have-nots in Nigeria are clear indicators that Nigeria is an under-developed nation. The rural people of the country are worse off by these yardsticks. The result is that poverty, hunger, diseases etc are much more pronounced in the rural areas than those of the urban centres. Anaughe & Okwudiafor (1987: p. 9) see rural development as “being concerned with any method used in raising the quality of life of the low income population living in rural areas on a self-sustaining basis through a fundamental transformation of the rural mode of production.”

For rural development to be achieved, the press has a role to play. This can come in the form of passing information about a nation‟s development opportunities for change, method and means of achieving possible change (Schramm, 1964).The need for rural mobilization as a countervailing force for development calls for formation, at the grassroots, of strong organization capable of articulating and protecting the interests of the local (rural) populace. Such grassroots voice has the capacity not only to draw attention to itself but also to force the central authorities to enter into a negotiated relationship with the rural communities. Melkote (1991:201) as cited in Soola (2003: p. 15) cited Uploff and Esman as underscoring the imperatives of rural local organization, stating that,

Those cases in which there were more organizations reaching down to the local level, accountable to the local people, and involved with rural development functions have accomplished rural development objectives more successfully with respect to the available resource base than have those with less rural organization.

The need for a cautious application of the media is informed by its potential both to serve as a catalyst and to act as a drag in the wheel of development and progress. The mass media according to Fair and Shah (1997: p. 25), rather than being purveyors of progress and a means of overcoming development, can infact, just be one more cause of underdevelopment in that they may serve not only to reinforce but also to perpetuate existing power relations and structures of inequality. The general use of print media in development is to provide information, to sensitize, reach and stabilise groups of rural people. Compared to other media, print has the advantage of being relatively cheap, as well as better to memorize because of the fact that written words or pictures stick better in mind. This medium is comparatively low-priced and available for a wide range of people. The newspaper which is classified under the print media has enduring characteristics which neither the radio nor television has. The newspaper, according to Moemeka (1990: p. 63).

Can be read and re-read at convenience thus allowing for fuller and better understanding of message contents. It can be stored away for future use, thus, making for the presentation of materials that are considered important for future reference. They are also capable of carrying literacy and non-formal education materials and of serving as reading materials for new literates,, thus ensuring that illiterates do not only learn to read but also read to learn.

Newspaper publication started in Nigeria in 1859 and today, there are quite a number of government and privately -owned newspapers in the country varying in frequency and time of publication as well as circulation rate, target audience and achievements. One of the primary functions of the newspaper is to objectively report news situation or events in all fields of human endeavour. Usually, management of the print media assesses the newsworthiness of events and based on the philosophy and interests of the organization, takes the decision on how best to present or showcase news events to achieve maximum effect. According to Hoslti (1969: p. 53), it also serves the purpose of describing trends in communication, analyzing techniques for persuasion, and relating known attributes of the audience to messages produced for them

Bittner (2005:22) opines that newspapers are a major force in forming public opinion and affecting national and international efforts toward economic progress and global understanding.

Williams (1978: p. 471-472) states that,

with the power of publicity, promotion and with a knowledge of existing conditions, the newspaper is in a better position than any other organization in the community to acquaint the general public with its needs and possibilities and to show how these needs may be met.

Agee (1979: p. 201) saw the need for simplicity when he suggested that “if newspapers are to fulfill their role of communication to the mass of the population they cannot indulge in writing styles and terminology so involved that many readers cannot comprehend.” Effective communication with the rural population would be impossible “unless the communicator enters into cultural context of the people and understands at first hand their economic and social peculiarities.” Moemeka (1990: p. 67). According to Akeju (1988), among other information needed by rural dwellers is information for increased productivity and income growth, information for social participation and political involvement. For effective rural development, according to Fakunle (1992:

p. 5-6) the rural dwellers therefore need to be provided with information on the following:

Health Service

Rural dwellers need information on first aid treatment and rural health education. Rural dwellers need to be educated and provided with information on how to improve the quality, value and nutritional balance of their food. They need to be enlightened on how diseases could be prevented and what to do when there is an epidemic.

Agricultural Activities

Farming is a major occupation of rural dwellers. Farmers in the rural areas need information and enlightenment on how they could complement the traditional farming system with the modern practice.

**Political programmes**

With the current political dispensation which put emphasis on the grassroots‟ participation, the rural dwellers need to be enlightened and integrated into the political process. The significance of every stage of the political process need to be explained to the rural dwellers with the role they are expected to play in order to install a purposeful and responsive government.

Infrastructural development

One of the major problems in the rural communities is insufficient funds to execute projects for communal purposes. The rural dwellers need information on how they can pull their money together to fund individual or community projects.

3.Community Journalism

Community journalism or civic journalism is a new area of focus for mass communicators all over the world. Because of the strength of the rural press to mobilize people to participate in the art and science of governance at the grasstroot level where majority of the people live especially in Africa, community journalism is endorsed by many as a soothing balm for advocacy and developmental journalism.

Kurpius (1999, p.3) outlines some of the major benefits of civic journalism. These are “increased diversity, greater depth and context of the news coverage, and a stronger understanding of the various communities that make a particular viewing area.”

Moemeka (1981), Myers (2000), Kurpius (1999) and other experts highlighted the relevance of community media in different spheres of human endeavour. For example, community journalism according to experts encourages journalists and news managers to find ways to capture citizen priorities, concerns and perspectives on different issues of importance to many different communities. As part of the process of creating connections to citizens, news managers are now finding ways to hear and understand the greatest diversity of voices and communities in their viewing and listening areas. Practicing community journalism helps both news content and source diversity by encouraging a discussion of citizen views and issues using a wide range of community perspectives.

The best reason for practicing community journalism is to create a stronger community understanding by news organisations and the journalists who work in these newsrooms. Inherent in this increased understanding is an ongoing conversation between journalists, citizens and public officials on issues facing their communities. The result of this conversation is larger file of community sources for stories and an increase in story ideas from various communities. These connections and the resulting coverage can help strengthen the value of your news product for citizens in your market (Kurpius, 1999).

The experiment on community newspapering in the 70s and 80s in Nigeria gives a clear picture of the potentials of community press in changing the fortunes of rural dwellers. For instance, through the Moribund Community Concord then owned by Late Chief M.K.O Abiola, Nigerian rural dwellers were journalistically blessed in different spheres of life.

Historically, the late sages, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe played crucial roles in the establishment of community newspapers in Nigeria. The duo established provincial newspapers which marked the beginning of the recognition of the role of community journalism and national development. The newspaper established by these leading nationalists, sociologically brought into limelight the cultural artifacts and ideo-facts of rural people in print journalism. They painted the sorry picture of abject poverty and backwardness in rural areas and that drew the attention of the government to the plight of rural dwellers. These papers informed the rural dwellers of great things or issues within their domains and those in cities. Through vernacular newspapers, village dwellers were wooed and mobilized to participate in developmental programmes of their communities, thus engendering social change. (Ate, 2008).

The establishment of the rural newspapers fine-tuned the world view of the down trodden and brought them closer to decision making process at the central level. The community newspapers established at the time in questions serve as a springboard for the establishment of radio and television stations in the 60s and 70s. It is important to point out that the localization of radio and TV in Nigeria took a cue from community newspapers. Today, both TV and radio do broadcast to the people in their predominant local dialects. (Duyile, 2005).

Some decades ago, some few newspapers were packaged for exclusive audience. There were Udoka (Ibo), Amana (Hausa) and Isokan (Yoruba). The mass media are potent tools for social change and community journalism if well harnessed and husbanded by the appropriate stakeholders.

Community media has the powers to evolve social change that could lead to rural transformation in different areas. Even though there are some few of community newspapers in Nigeria today, these papers are too insignificant to take care of the large and heterogeneous audience at the grassroot level.

In terms of broadcast media, though most state-owned radio and television stations in the country do broadcast in local languages, the establishment of full blown community broadcasting in Nigeria is still a matter of debate. A veteran broadcaster, and one of the leading apostles of community broadcasting in Nigeria, Chief Taiwo Alimi at a workshop on “Curriculum Guidelines for Improved Journalism Education in Nigeria” organized by the Nigerian Press Council in October, 2007 argued that the country will not make any meaningful progress without community broadcasting. The time to embark on comprehensive community journalism according to him, is now.

**Community Radio**

Community radio broadcasting is designed and structured by the local, rural community to meet its expression are enlightenment needs. (Konkwo, 2010). Megwa (2011) added that community radio has demystified Radio as Community dwellers take pride in it and consider it as their own. Alumuku (2006, p.27) contends that “community radio is emerging as one of the best forms of local community communication.” Such a grassroot communication approach according to Traber (1986) can become an agent for change in religious, socio-economic development, and in the struggle for human rights.

Alumuku (2006 pp 33-34) identifies two aspects of community radio. These are geographic community radio and community of interest radio. He argued that geographically defined communities are “those communities which exist in a specific locality and which construct meaning from a common language and symbols and therefore share an identity by virtue of these.”

Conversely, communities of interest as reasoned by him are not defined by where people live geographically but “rather by what they are interested in. Their interest could be music or local language or their involvement in adult education at various levels.”

As promising as community radio is, it is just trying to find its feet on Nigerian media firmament. The Nigerian Community Radio Coalition (NCRC) on April 21, 2009 urged the Federal Government to empower Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to speed up the process of issuance of community radio license to prospective broadcasters. Community radio broadcasting in Nigeria is dwarfed by unprecedented challenges ranging from policy misdirection, lack of legislative backing, official red typism to mention only a few. Konkwo (2010, PP 178-179) captured the unfortunate and abysmal trend:

It is important to note that many years after the Federal Government embarked on a policy reform process which involved the review of the 1990 National Mass Communication Policy and design a National Radio Policy, it is yet to conclude this process as the final documents have not been released to the public.

Similarly, the Broadcasting Reform Law Bill introduced to the National Assembly by the executive branch of government is yet to see the light of the day. While the regulatory body, the NBC, has made provision for community broadcasting with its regulatory framework, it is still disturbing to note the agencies lethargic attitudes towards the licensing process.

While community radio in Nigeria is still at the gestation period, it is necessary for stakeholders in the industry to integrate community radio with new media technologies for effective and efficient result

The 1996 Pan-Africa meeting in Abuja, Nigeria considered the issue of deregulation of community radio and raised some critical issues that need to be addressed. The Abuja Chapter observes that:

i Although deregulation is commendable, there were fears of the possible adverse influence on African culture and family values.

ii.Although electronic media has been used in some cases to aggravate national crisis, it has greater potential for resolution of crisis and the promotion of social, political and economic development.

iii.The altitudes of Africans towards locally manufactured products has hampered indigenous initiatives.

iv.The rights of broadcasters in the performance of their duty are not adequately protected in several countries in Africa.

**New Media Technologies**

The term new media according to Musa (2009, p. 13) “encompasses the emergence of digital, computerized or networked information and communication technologies in the later part of the 20th century.” Technology as reasoned by Rogers (1995) is an important aspect in the diffusion of an innovation. This innovation according to him is best communicated using the new media in order to reach the widest audience in the shortest frame. Joshi cited by Musa (2009) argued that modern communication must serve as a means to societal development.

Rice (1984) defined the new media as communication technologies that enable or facilitate user-to-user interactivity between user and information. Flew (2002) contended that as a result of the evolution of new media technologies, globalization occurs. Croteau and Hoynes (2003:p.11) explained that new media “radically break the connection between physical place and social place, making physical location much less significant for our social relationships.”

Carely in Flew (2002) refers to the shortening of distance between people all over the world as “death of distance” The New Media has the ability to connect like-minded worldwide. Monavich (2001, p. 41) remarked that the new media follows the logic of the post industrial or globalised society whereby “every citizen can construct her own custom, lifestyle and select her ideology from a large number of choices”.

Megwa (2011) believes that hybrised media – Community Radio and Information Communication Technology can lead to poverty reduction. In a study he conducted in South Africa on community radio, community conversation with stakeholders, face-to-face interviews with management and workers of community radio; focused group interview and observational study were used as data collection methods. It was conceptually established that technology can be good or bad depending on the usage.

The importance of technology in the mass media cannot be underestimated. Rupert Murdoch cited by Ikiebe (2011, p.4) establishes this fact:

To find something comparable, you have to go back 500 years to the printing press, the birthplace of the media. Technology is shifting power away from the editors, the publishers and the media elite. Now it’s the people who are taking control.

The people are taking control. Community media is about the people and the new media also empower the people to take their communication destinies into their hands. That takes us into the concept of media convergence. Media convergence as a change force according to Ikiebe (2011, p. 4) is “producing borderless world, and is posing new regulatory, ethical, cultural, social and geo-political challenges.” Media convergence produced conversed journalists in the digital age. Dominick (2009) explained that the convergence reporter is one who can write stories for a print or a website, shoot and post photos online, and a video as well. The concept presupposes the convergence of the print journalist and video journalist to produce the 21st century version of the news correspondence. This feat cannot be possible without the use of digital and cell phones, video cameras and high speed internet access. Convergence media is about technology.

**Development Journalism vis-à-vis Western Style**

Development journalism should help to create awareness about problems of the society. Equally diligent efforts need to be made to publicize developmental work, so that others may know about it and in the best case scenario draw inspiration from it. Without gainsaying, true globalization has impacted tremendously on the media and one important implication of this development is the revolution in information dissemination. With the new wave of democratization witnessed in Nigeria (as being claimed by Nigerian government) the press have become active participant in the tasks of promoting, projecting and supporting the activities of government. However, the predominant concern of this paper bothers on development journalism and its challenges.

Development journalism is perceived as the alternative journalism primarily focused on national development – agriculture, family planning, health and rural development cum projecting to the forefront the plight of the poor masses. Development journalism is primarily community oriented journalism as against the western style of journalism which has failed to show concerns about such issues as bridging the gap between the centre and the periphery because, there are disparities in the level of development in Africa and the West. There are disparities in institutional, infrastructural and technological capacity (Imisim, 2006). Though, it is acknowledged that the Nigerian style of journalism was handed over to us by the West, it is expedient to revisit such a style in order to capture the mood and needs of Nigerian citizens. Western style journalism is primarily investigative and entertaining and not so much concerned

with advocacy on the current trend of insecurity such as Boko Haram, bank robbery, commissioning of toilets and boreholes which are basic needs of life.

There is a difference between the western model and Nigerian brand of development journalism. Hence, the diffusion approach had not worked in Nigeria because of existing social and economic disparities that hamper not only the flow of information but also an adequate understanding of what is disseminated. Development in the developed world may mean the latest development in the area of scientific research, while development journalism in the Third World may focus on road commissioning, water supply and other basic amenities which the West have since overcome.

**Misconceptions**

Mainstream media do not give development reporting the place that it warrants in our society. It is often relegated to niche columns, magazines and journals. The few positive issues and developmental projects that are undertaken by the mainstream media are not highlighted enough. The mainstream media pretend to have incorporated development journalism into their daily duties by reporting government projects and statements; and views of policy makers in their publications but this is far from it.

Development journalism should help to create awareness about problems plaguing the society. Equally, diligent efforts need to be made to publicize development work so that others who may not know about it can in the best case scenario, draw inspiration from it.

Different forms of Development Journalism Investigative Development Journalism

The first form as classified by Kunczik (1995, p. 84) is comparable to a western style investigate journalism. It comprises reporting which critically examines development projects, on the one hand, and controls government activities on the other. For this form to be effective, freedom of the press will be a basic requirement.

Benevolent Authoritarian Development Journalism

Another form of classification of the development journalism by Kunczik is the benevolent authoritarian. This allows systematic manipulation of information in favour of a subtle development serving the common welfare. Journalists in this milieu form a kind of free intelligence and critically examine the aims of national development and the applicable instruments in a rational discourse via reasonable criteria free of social constraints.

**Socio-technological Development Journalism**

What seems to be a pragmatic solution to the mentioned descriptive and normative views is offered by the so-called socio-technological development journalism. The approach strictly adheres to the needs of the population and supports the (normative) perception that the people concerned should participate in the development projects. The tasks of journalism, from this view, include motivating the audience to actively cooperate and on the other hand, defending the interests of those concerned. Interaction of population and journalists is required so that the audience will be involved in the decision making process. To achieve this journalists must be capable of distinguishing the crucial points and of comprehensibly pointing up every social process for the recipients as complex as it may be. Assistance for interpretation has to be provided for decision making. Also, journalists have to be committed to finding solutions while it is equally important to show success stories achieved by single citizens, which can serve as role models for the society.

Since development is considered as solution to social problems in general, development journalism is no longer exclusively limited to rural areas. Development news should refer to the needs of people, which may vary from region to region but generally include primary needs such as food, housing, and employment, while secondary needs as transportation, energy sources and electricity and tertiary needs such as cultural diversity, recognition and dignity are also involved.

Mass communication theory holds that one of the preconditions for the development journalism is the availability of a potential audience (Odhiambo 1991, p.18). The other preconditions are the development of symbolic language technology and evolution of freedom of expression. Peters (2010) succinctly summarizes that media development is sacrosanct to development journalism; as a result, it will encompass a wide range of work which can be generally defined as actions in support of:

a)a system of media regulation and administration that ensures freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity.

b)strengthening media capacity to inform people on issues that shape their lives.

c)plurality and diversity of media, transparent and equal market conditions and full transparency of ownership.

d)media as a platform for democratic discourse within a climate or respect for journalism that represents professional independence and diversity of views and interests in society.

e)professional capacity building and supporting institutions for advocacy and development of media freedom, independence, pluralism and diversity.

f)professional training and skills development and for the media sector as a whole to be both monitored and supported by professional associations and civil society organizations.

g)infrastructural capacity that is sufficient to support independent and pluralistic media so that the media sector is characterized by high or rising levels of public access; efficient use of technology to gather and distribute news information (GFMO World Conference, 2007).

The theory of development sees the press as an instrument of social justice and a tool for achieving beneficial social changes. In other words, the media should carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy.

However, in reality, things have not worked out in line with this theory. In Nigeria, there has been pressure on journalists to ally themselves with the political forces, but in doing so they have lost their independence. In this way, journalists can be severely hampered from reporting fully, fairly and independently; hence, we cannot be certain that development does get advanced in such situation.

**Trend Journalism a Barrier to Development**

There is today a democratic government in power in this country unlike at any other time in the past. A new climate of understanding exists in which creative journalism can flourish in the country. A creative press should be proactive. It should set goals for the nation and give direction to development. It is expected to seek and report news and events to increase the understanding of the country by both itself and foreigners. But without development content in local and global issues, the media cannot build the consensus among government, civil society, the private sector and the international community. International issues mentioned here bother on issues that relate to awareness, participatory democracy and self development. For instance, international debate on the growing of cocoa will enhancs the local production. The press in Nigeria today is expected to act as a catalyst for sustainable and equitable changes. Then, it can offer itself as a serious platform for the alliance of common interests.

**Attraction of Development Journalism**

Development journalism has a lot of attraction for developing countries. In countries where poverty is the norm, the government of the day wants and needs as much support as it can get. Government can probably have to take decisions which are based on the common good but which harm individual liberties. These decisions may be highly unpopular but they have to be taken, and a hostile press can hold back government’s progress while a supportive press can help the government push these policies ahead. This follows one of the definitions or the duty of a journalist reporting on development to critically examine, evaluate and report the relevance of a development project to national and local needs; the difference between a planned scheme and its actual implementation; and the difference between its impact on people as claimed by government officials and as it actually is. Ability to assist in nation building is an important function of development journalism.

**Pitfalls in Development Journalism**

The pitfalls in development approach can be viewed in different perspectives. In the actual facts, the press becomes far less critical and eventually is forced to give up its “watchdog” role in society. As it continually panders to the government, the press loses its critical edge and becomes nothing more than another government mouthpiece. When this happens, it paves the way for a virulent underground or alternative press with a strong antigovernment approach. This happens most via an opposition party establishing an opposition medium to criticize the government. As the press tries to promote the government and the common good, it can start to lose sight of the individual and the individual’s human rights. If critically examined, it would be discovered that development journalism can be equated with one in which the government exercises tight control and prevents freedom of expression, all in the name of noble ends.

**Challenges of Development Journalism**

Odugberi and Norri have said development journalism often faces obstacles in the form of low professional journalistic standards, a lack of financial resources, work technical skills, fragmented legal frameworks and an undemocratic political system. Also, there is risk of patronage – the media may not be able to break free from its political constraints and may operate according to clientelism or be captured by private interests.

Nigeria journalism is today being faced with numerous challenges which impede development journalism. Some of these challenges are:

(1)The digital age has made it difficult to define the role of the professional journalist vis- à-vis the citizen journalists (the receiver who is at the same time the producer of news). If professional journalists tailor their duty towards development journalism in the growing pervasiveness of digital technology, online journalism is a threat that lives in the subliminal of the pressmen. This threat brings the fear of losing their jobs.

(2)Again, the global challenges such as climate change, cultural and resource conflict among others are paramount to elites. Therefore, the media are under pressure to cover such reports because they depend on the patronage of the elite for economic survival.

(3)Ownership pattern is a pertinent issue. Business moguls who are publishers are not interested in development journalism because they have created a class fashioned after global trend for themselves. As such, editors and reporters stick to the mission and vision of the publishers to retain their job.

(4)Lack of modern equipment to reach those who lack the wherewithal to contact the mass media and make news is a serious problem. The Marxist ideologists have submitted that he who owns the means of production also controls the media.

(5)The need to beat deadlines is also a major constraint to development journalism. Journalists’ natural competition to have their by-lines perpetually often robs the poor masses of the chances of making news. Since mass media are the elite means of communication, journalists scout for news considered to be prominent in their favour. “Prominence” in this sense connotes maintaining the status quo, which is, of the western style, maintaining the interest of the elites. Hence, a means must be devised to reverse this ugly trend so that developmental issues and issues of ordinary masses can be of importance.

(6)Commercialization of news hampers development journalism. News of less importance filters into the public for consumption as a result of news commercialization whereas other developmental issues are left unattended to. It is high time journalists digressed from cash and carry journalism in order to serve both the rich and poor alike if the word “mass” has to be meaningful, else media will continue to promote the gap between the haves and the have-nots. McQuail (2005) rightly quoted Picard, (2004) that the primary content of the media today is commercialized news designed to appeal to broad audience, to entertain, to be cost effective and whose attention can be sold to advertisers. The result is that stories that may offend elite minorities are ignored in favour of those more acceptable and entertaining to a larger member of readers. Stories that are costly to cover are downplayed or ignored; such stories that create financial risks are ignored and the effect leads to homogenization of media content in coverage of media issues (McQuail 2005, p. 125).

(7)Total dependence on the press releases which characterizes the present day journalism in Nigeria is not good for this part of the world. The implication is that ordinary citizens will be absolutely out of news. Of course, news releases are tailored to further the interests of the public figure that issued it. So, instead of our media becoming involved, they should be apprehensive.

(8)Apathy to reading and research by journalists covering development issues is a critical challenge. Past are the days when journalists were contemporaries of novelists. Hardly do we read features these days with phrases or memorable quotes of multiple authors to illustrate a point. Journalists no longer read widely to dig up buried issues that are considered less important but sacrosanct to national development.

(9)The plurality of the Nigerian media is a reflection of the diversity of Nigerian society: regional, cultural, ethnic, religious, political and ideological. As Kano Communiqué captures it; this is a major source of subjectivity in the Nigeria journalism practice and it affects the practice of development journalism.

**Meeting the Needs**

If development journalism will be relevant to the setting(s) in which it is conceived necessary variables must be harmonized to ensure it achieves development purpose. Soola (2003, p. 165) identifies training, working conditions/conditions of service for journalists and the socio- political and economic climate as necessities which demand serious attention before meaningful result can be guaranteed. Training of journalists who will in turn carry the message of development is crucial but this aspect has been neglected. Only few journalists are exposed to the language of science, technology and economics because training in most higher institutions is restricted to mass communication related arms and theories; only few who read independently will equip and update themselves in other fields of life. Meanwhile, society complexities must be understood before development journalism can take place.

Only a handful of media houses pay attention to the working conditions of their staff despite the fact that remuneration is poor. Some graduates receive N10,000 monthly in so many local media houses. Journalists who are supposed to cover development news are not interested in going to the interior parts of the country because of the cost implications coupled with the fact that they may not get financial gift from those in the rural settlement to augment their pocket. Development will continue to elude this country if journalists do not take into consideration the 80% of rural dwellers who form the bulk of the population.

In reality, the existing media of communication will serve us the needed mechanism to facilitate development. Harmonisation of both modern and indigenous channels of communication at the appropriate level will properly achieve desired results. Employing television to create awareness in demonstration, using print media to circulate the development plan in reference and for people to possess first hand information for themselves at convenience will achieve a huge success. The capability of radio wider reach to mobilize both at vertical and horizontal level plus the use of village square, market unions and associations, opinion and traditional rulers to convey development messages will go a longer way to put Nigerian nation on the development track. Since development journalism is a product of the consequence of disillusionment created by the dependency syndrome arising from western dominance of the international flow of information which led to the emergence of New International Informational and Communication Order, development journalists should depart from the old paradigm of news gathering and dissemination in western style to achieve the development calling in news reportage.

**2.3 Theoretical Framework.**

This study is built on Development Media theory on the grounds that community media, if well positioned, could facilitate remarkable development in the society.

**2.3.1 Development Media Theory**

Development media theory was put forward as a means of paying for the imbalance in development and information flow of the third world countries and a solution to the technological problems facing them. The third world countries are beset by problems that make development of mass communication system difficult (Daramola, 2003).

In order to deal with peculiar developmental challenges facing third world countries, this theory was put in place with emphasis on the right to communicate and the need to use communication to galvanize social change. The tenets of Development Media Theory as enunciated by McQuail (2000) are:

i.Media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with naturally established policy.

ii.Freedom of the media should be open to economic priorities and development needs of the society.

iii.Media should give priority in the content to the national culture and language.

iv.Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedom in their information gathering and dissemination tasks.

v.In the interest of development, the state has a right to intervene or restrict media operation.

Folarin (1998, p.31) argues that development media theory seeks “to explain the normative behavior of the press in countries that are conventionally classified as “developing countries” or “third world countries”.

He pontificates that there were (and are still) peculiar circumstances or characteristics of developing countries that make the application of other normative theories difficult. These according to him include:

1.Absence or inadequate supply of requisite communication infrastructure;

2.Relative limited supply of requisite professional skills;

3.Relative lack of cultural production resources;

4.Relatively limited availability of media-literate audience;

**CHAPTER THREE**

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**3.1 Research Design**

Research design sets out the plan of action for a research project and in the process helps the researcher to develop their research question(s), methodologies and the implementation procedure that includes data collection and analysis for the effective conduct of the research project. There are three broad research designs namely; quantitative design, qualitative design and mixed methods design. The research design that a researcher finally settles on is influenced by the problem under investigation and the questions that the research is seeking to answer, as well as the resources available to the researcher in terms of finances, time and qualified personnel. Also the characteristics of the subject of study and the researcher‘s personal preferences play a critical role in the decision on the research design to be adopted. Whichever the design is eventually decided upon, it has to find roots in grounded theory, meaning that the research methodology must have the capacity to test and strengthen existing theories by the end of the research undertaking.

**3.2 Qualitative Case Study Approach**

This case study was qualitative in orientation. The choice of the qualitative orientation was informed by the subject matter under investigation and the preferred approach of case study. Electing to study the place of community journalism and challenges of rural reporting in Nigeria; with specific focus on Afemai newspaper based in Afemai Edo state made qualitative research an attractive option. This afforded the researcher the opportunity to study the variables in their natural settings; employing a combination of observation, interviews, and document reviews without manipulating the study variables.

**3.3 population and Sampling**

The sampling frame for the respondents in the focus group discussions consisted of regular audience of Afemai newspaper. This was provided by the media house, which has a data base of its regular listeners generated from numerous sources including listener clubs associated with the radio station as well as membership of common interest groups which have grown out of the listener clubs. The respondents to participate in the focus group discussions were then randomly picked from three clusters of older men, women and youth (18 - 35 years). For key informant interviews, a list of potential respondents was drawn beforehand and those listed interviewed either face to face or a questionnaire sent for them to fill and return.

**3.4 Data Collection**

A good case study seldom relies on a single source of data. Rather multiple sources are employed so as to ensure that the data collected is sufficiently rich, contextual and corroborative as to address the research questions and support the analysis and findings of the study. Also, multiple sources of data help to address concerns about validity, reliability and generalizability of the study‘s findings. In this study, data was collected from multiple sources, thus; secondary sources in form of documents and findings of previous similar studies as well as information that was relevant to the subject and location of the study, fieldwork through interviews (key informants, select listeners, and local opinion leaders), focus group discussions and direct observation.

**3.5 Data Analysis**

Data analysis seeks to make information collected from the field and other sources manageable and in the process making the identification of commonalities, contrasts and comparisons of the different pieces of information possible. The essence of data analysis is to identify relationships -and the nature thereof - between and among the variables being investigated; setting the stage for interpretation of the identified relationships.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION**

**4.1 Introduction**

This study set out with the following specific objectives:

i. Examine the role of community journalism in rural development.

ii. Examine the effectiveness of these channels of communication.

iii. Examine the attitude and perception of rural dwellers to community journalism.

iv. Examine the challenges of rural reporting in Nigeria.

After visiting Afemai Newspaper’s principal catchment area and talking to a cross-section of the target audience as well as interviewing a number of key informants in the community broadcasting arena, following here below are the findings as they relate to the stated objectives.

**4.1 THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY JOURNALISM IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

The establishment of Afemai Newspaper in Afemai was deliberately premised on the belief that the community radio station would play an important role in positively impacting the social, cultural, economic and political circumstances of the local community. A realistic evaluation of the long- term impacts of the radio station against these factors would require a reasonable time lapse that would allow for the appropriate attribution of the observed changes to the intervention of the radio station‘s broadcast programmes. Analysis of the sentiments expressed by the respondents in this study reveals that even though these are still early days, the establishment of Afemai Newspaper has led to a number of fundamental changes that bode well for the social, cultural, economic and political wellbeing of the Audience in Afemai .

**4.1.1Cultural Repository**

On strength of using the local language Afemai Newspaper has become an attractive and reliable source of education, information and entertainment for the residents of Afemai – both young and old. But the importance of the radio station goes beyond those three aspects. The use of the indigenous vernacular language is in itself a positive thing culturally since it goes a long way in promoting and expanding the use of the language particularly among the youth who may easily be drawn to secondary languages such as English at the expense of their own mother tongue. In this context then, Afemai Newspaper is playing the role of a guardian and cultural repository of the language and culture of the people of Afemai .

**4.1.2 Drive towards Behavioural Change**

Afemai Newspaper has deliberately developed programmes that focus on various themes that affect the daily lives of the listening audience. Educative programmes highlight issues of health, education, agriculture, environment and entrepreneurship among others. Health takes up a prominent place in conversation forums in Afemai particularly in relation to the high incidences of HVI/AIDS and malaria in the area. Radio programmes highlighting cultural practices and lifestyles that may predispose the listeners to HIV infection are discussed regularly as are mitigating measures to combat the continued spread of the pandemic. Listeners are advised to take heed lest they become part of the unpleasant statistics surrounding HIV/AIDS in the region. Cultural practices such as widow ―cleansing‖ – whereby a woman who has lost her husband to death; no matter the cause of the death; has to undergo a culturally prescribed cleansing process often through sexual liaison with a ―jater‖ who may be her late husband‘s clan mate or any other man for that matter – has been widely blamed for accelerating the spread of the HIV/AIDS infections among the communities that practice this tradition.

**4.1.3 Highlighting the Effects of HIV/AIDS**

Other issues that are a common menu on Afemai Newspaper include; an increasing number of orphaned and highly vulnerable children occasioned by the death of their parents resulting from HIV/AIDS related health complications. One direct consequence of this has been a completely new phenomenon of children heading households as well as old grandparents taking up the tasks of fending for their ailing adult children and their grandchildren and the accompanying psycho- socio trauma. Afemai Newspaper regularly discusses all these issues with the community not only to call attention to the reality of the problem and the accompanying costs to the individuals and community collectively, but also to rally the community towards coming to terms with the situation and identifying ways and means of confronting the problem(s) for a sustainable long- lasting solution.

**4.1.4 Environmental Conservation**

Environmental issues have, over the recent decades, become prominent universal themes of public discourse, research, policy and legal formulation. This demonstrates the critical importance that the entire world has assigned to matters ecological. Years of unchecked degradation and unsustainable utilization of ecological resources by man have gradually resulted in fundamental changes in the ecological balance. The effects are now being felt in terms of global climate change; with unpredictable and sometimes extreme weather conditions such as severe flooding, extended drought, tornadoes and hurricanes obtaining in many parts of the world. The world can no longer ignore the need for environmental conservation; and this calls for action and participation at all levels, right from the grassroots.

Afemai Newspaper has been keen in disseminating education and information to the community on the need to diversify from heavy reliance on the lake fisheries and embrace arable farming, livestock rearing and even fish farming where the fish are bred in ponds. In response, a number of people have diversified from fishing into horticulture while a local community based organization has developed ways of utilizing the invasive water hyacinth for economic benefits that include manure. Of course such a shift of a livelihood base requires time and constant persuasion in order to change the community‘s long-held dependency on fishing industry. The platform provided by Afemai Newspaper has been used to create a running debate around the issue in order to address fears, prejudices and challenges that may constrain the need to adapt to the changing social, economic and ecological circumstances. At the same time the radio station prompts discussion about the advantages to be gained from diversification of livelihood bases by the community.

**4.1.5 Campaign for Freedom and Justice**

Democracy in its purest form espouses equity, fairness, freedom and justice as its key pillars. Conversely, corruption, which is an antithesis to fair-play and justice, brings about undue advantage to a few while disadvantaging many others. Yet corruption continues to be a major hindrance to equitable distribution of common national resources in Nigeria. At all levels, the corruption vice seems to be deeply rooted and permeates almost all spheres of life. At the grassroots, it is not uncommon for the citizens to induce the local administration with all sorts of payments in order to receive services they should in the first place be given free of any levies, a situation that has been groomed by the administration officials for selfish gain. Where justice needs to be dispensed, it is common for the aggrieved persons to lose out if their adversaries have the financial resources to subvert the course of justice. In situations where opportunities or resources have been set aside to benefit the needy and the least advantaged members of the society, it often is the able and the advantaged who end up benefitting from these opportunities and resources. This situation serves to dis-empower the least fortunate members of the society and continues to perpetuate and exacerbate their marginalization and vulnerability. One way of fighting this vice is by exposing it and bringing it out in the open in order to call attention to its existence and divulge its negative effects on the less privileged in the society in particular and the entire society in general.

Afemai Newspaper is alive to the prevalence of corrupt practices in public and even private offices that are charged with rendering services to the community. The station has not shied away from exposing these malpractices and views it as a duty and responsibility to its audience. Corrupt practices in the allocation and disbursement of public resources such as educational bursaries for the needy children in edo state, the misuse of funds from the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), under- hand dealings in the award and servicing of tenders in public and government institutions, nepotism and favouritism in allocation of jobs and other opportunities are just a representation of what Afemai Newspaper regularly highlights in its news items and features. This is done at great risk to the personal security of the journalists and managers of the station, since those behind these corrupt practices inevitably are never happy at being exposed and often seek to retaliate. Many times, the journalists and station managers have been threatened both directly and indirectly and warned of dire repercussions should they continue to crusade against certain dealings. Whereas this has slowed down the efforts by Afemai Newspaper towards fighting corruption and impunity that goes with it, it has in no way deterred the station from its determination to play its part in the fight against corruption and its costly effects on social, economic and political advancement of the community in Afemai and indeed Nigeria as a whole.

**4.2 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THESE CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

As Girard (2007) and Jordan (2006) argue, community journalism should be part of the communication processes that contributes to social change facilitating inclusion, participation, and empowerment. This process should culminate in good governance and accountability, democratization, poverty reduction, achieving development goals, cultural diversity and peace building in local communities. Afemai Newspaper, like any other typical community radio station is driven by these ideals and works towards realizing the expectations that go with them. Through a variety of programming formats, Afemai Newspaper is now favourably considered by its listeners as a platform for educating and empowering the people of Afemai . To quote one respondent, who is a local businessman:

*“We have been in darkness for a long time, until this radio station came here. We have been educated by it and learnt a lot of things relating to agriculture, health, education and many others. The radio station has mobilized people here to form groups and start to spearhead their own development. We are truly being empowered”*

This simple yet powerful statement aptly captures the place of Afemai Newspaper in the hearts of its listeners and the importance that the radio station holds for the people of Afemai . The implications for the socio-cultural, economic and political development of the radio station‘s catchment area are therefore quite enormous and far reaching if the transformational potential of Afemai Newspaper is fully and effectively harnessed.

**4.2.1Overcoming the Language Barrier**

People communicate best and most effectively in their first language. Taking this into consideration, community medias are expected to embrace and largely broadcast in a language that is spoken by a majority of those within its reach. This requirement assumes an even greater importance if a considerable size of the target audience is illiterate in so far as secondary languages are concerned. Afemai Newspaper was the first (and at the time of this study remained the only) radio station of any kind to set up base in Edo state and therefore broadcasts primarily in the Ghotou-Uneme-Yekhee language that is spoken by a majority of the residents of Afemai and indeed the wider edo. Prior to the establishment of this radio station at Asembo Bay in Afemai in the year 2010, the local population - a majority of who speak the Ghotou-Uneme-Yekhee language – only remotely interacted with several radio stations, some of whom broadcast in Ghotou-Uneme-Yekhee . For instance, even though the national broadcaster the Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) had been running vernacular language broadcasts that included Ghotou-Uneme-Yekhee , these were never broadcast throughout the day, but had specific time allocations each day as the daily air time was shared among the different language audiences.

**4.2.2 Close Identification with the Community**

The key difference between Afemai Newspaper and these other stations broadcasting in Ghotou-Uneme-Yekhee language is the orientation. All these stations are purely commercial entities, driven by the profiteering motive. Afemai Newspaper on the other hand, being a community radio station, focuses on public good broadcasting. The other notable difference is the location of these stations. Whereas Afemai Newspaper is based in a largely rural area, the other stations are based in either benin cities, perhaps a testimony of where their heart really belongs. Wits Justice Project (2013) agrees with this argument when it states that an integral part of community radio‘s appeal (…..) – both in terms of access and information-sharing – is how (the) community radio is designed to be rooted and located. Community radio can be said to ―enjoy a unique intimacy with its owners and audience… (and) gives listeners a sense of community and identity‖. A respected member of the community in Afemai who is a retired high school teacher was very categorical on his take on the importance of Afemai Newspaper to the local community. He said:

“It would be very disappointing if this radio station were to be removed from here. The station has created a class (read group) of people who never used to listen to radio. But now that we have Afemai Newspaper broadcasting in their first language and right here within their vicinity, it has become very popular”

The group of new radio listeners mentioned by the respondent happens to be women and the illiterate who may have felt excluded from the radio stations using English as their broadcast language. The setting up of Afemai Newspaper within their locality coupled with its use of the local Ghotou-Uneme-Yekhee language in its broadcasts has attracted this previously marginalized section of the community. The economics of accessing information from other sources such as newspapers and television were also discussed, with the respondents acknowledging that it was cheaper for most of them to access information via radio than daily newspapers and television. At the time of this study, a daily newspaper cost N100.00, the same cost of dry cells that would power a radio receiver for almost a week. Television sets on the other hand would require availability of electric power which is not readily accessible by most rural populations.

**4.2.3 A Cultural Mirror**

Afemai Newspaper was commended for providing a podium for the residents of Afemai to examine and evaluate their culture in view of the rapid and ever-changing lifestyles. The station has a late night show dubbed ―cultural talk‖ which is quite popular. Cultural talk is an interactive programme on which the listeners call in or send short text messages offering their opinion on topical issues under discussion. The respondents had the following to say:

“The cultural talk is very important to us and we look forward to it always. It does not matter that it is broadcast late at night. We all listen and even call in to make our contribution when the programme is on air”

It is a demonstration of the importance that these listeners attach to their cultural development that they are very keen to listen to discussions concerning the changes occurring in their culture and the factors that pose threats to this very culture. The objective of the talk show is to rally the community to isolate these threats to the community‘s moral fabric and seek collective solutions to the identified threats. The show tackles a wide range of issues that include highlighting some of the culturally repugnant practices that have crept into the community for instance at the fish landing beaches where commercial sex work has taken root. By giving prominence to long-held yet retrogressive cultural beliefs and practices, Afemai Newspaper acts as a mirror through which the listeners are able to examine where they stand culturally against a world that has become essentially a global village. In the process, the listeners appreciate the role that the radio station is playing in promoting the cultural development of their community.

**4.2.4 Community Mobilization**

Mobilization is a critical factor in development and it entails bringing together and deploying a whole lot of resources that include the human resource. In Afemai , Afemai Newspaper has become a critical catalyst for mobilizing the community for common action. Networks have been created of people who previously did not have acquaintance with one another, culminating in formation and formal registration of at least 13 common interest groups made up largely of people who had come together primarily as listeners of Afemai Newspaper. Also, through the radio station, members of these groups have been able to mobilize resources to support any of their own in times of either bereavement or any other urgent need. In such circumstances, listeners have been able to raise funds and/or offer other material support to the listener in need using the Afemai Newspaper network. This is what the respondents had to say:

“When one of us is hospitalized, bereaved, or in any kind of need such as school fees for a child, we quickly come together and give them whatever support we can pool for their benefit”.

Here, the radio station is seen as playing the role of fostering fraternity and good neighbourliness amongst its listeners. In essence, the listeners are in a way being encouraged to be one another‘s keeper. This enhances cohesion and harmony in the community making it possible for the people to generally present a united front when confronting communal issues. And it is not only in matters of emergency that Afemai Newspaper has been used by members of the community, but also in matters relating to socio-economic development. In the words of one respondent;

“the newspaper has helped members of this community come together and initiate development programmes. Also, when I have a problem, I talk about it on radio and my friends come to my aid”

**4.2.5 Crusading for a Moral Society**

Moral uprightness is a tenet that is highly coveted in all societies. It is, as it were, the fibre that holds the society firmly together. Observance and adherence to certain cultural and religious practices as collectively ascribed by the community is an integral part of a people‘s way of life. Spiritual teachings as well as cultural ceremonies and rituals are among the ways of motivating members of a community to uphold morality within their community and Afemai Newspaper has provided a platform for the religious leaders in Afemai to engage their listeners by providing broadcast airtime. A local religious leader who has been given airtime to preach on the station every week was very upbeat about Afemai Newspaper. He says:

“Afemai Newspaper has been very helpful in highlighting anti-social and immoral activities that may be going on in our neighbourhood. In the process, we religious leaders are given pointers on what to pray and teach about in our churches and other gatherings”

This respondent acknowledges the role played by Afemai Newspaper in bringing to light anti-social and immoral behaviour within the community and in the process triggering the necessary response from the religious organizations and other custodians of communal moral probity. Besides religious programmes, there are cultural discussion and talk shows that focus on moral values of the local community – establishing the long-held moral practices by the local community and their core functions; identifying the changes that have been brought about by modernity; and pointing out the threats posed to the social fabric if an effective balance is not established between maintenance of the core societal moral values and the inevitability of embracing modernity. In fact, one of the most followed programmes at Afemai Newspaper is the cultural talk show that goes on air late at night until early in the morning. When the station attempted to get it off air, the listeners protested vigorously and petitioned for its reinstatement; an indication of the acceptability, appropriateness and popularity of the content carried on the said programme. On another front, the radio station has been active in spearheading a campaign against commercial sex work and other forms of anti-social behaviour such as substance abuse along the fish landing beaches in Afemai and edo state in general.

**4.4 THE CHALLENGES OF RURAL REPORTING IN NIGERIA**

Setting up a broadcasting station like radio station, Tv station etc is an expensive undertaking. A study by Africa Farm Radio Research Initiative (AFRRI) in 2008 estimates that it cost between US Dollars 10,000 – 15,000 to equip a small community radio station that would transmit to a radius of 50 miles. Thus, in addition to setting up the broadcast and transmission equipment, there is the acquiring of a broadcast licence, building a studio, employment of staff to gather, edit and produce programmes as well as publicity to announce the establishment of the radio station. All these require a considerable monetary investment.

**4.4.1 Cost of Setting up a Community Newspaper Station**

Broadcast equipment and machinery constitute a significant component of the costs of setting up a community radio station. Good and powerful high quality equipment, even for a small community radio station serving a geographical reach of 50 miles in radius would cost a lot of money in the region of between US Dollars 10,000 to 15,000 as alluded to earlier in this study. For a budding community radio with limited financial resources, acquiring the kind of equipment that would get them started off on the right footing becomes a big challenge in. Many of the community radio stations choose to buy equipment of relatively lower quality and power ending up with a lower transmission quality and geographical reach. It would be great support to the establishment and growth of community radio if the government were to waive customs duty on equipment that is meant for use by this category of radio stations.

Licensing fees and related conditionalities present another challenge for community radio stations.

**4.4.2 Weak Financial Base**

A weak financial base is one of the key challenges that community journalism in Nigeria have to grapple with. This challenge is partly borne out of the legal and policy framework under which this type of radio operates, but also out of the financing model where most of the community radio stations depended on donor funding especially at the beginning. The community radio broadcasting model is a not-for-profit type of radio meant to give the rural and other marginalized communities a voice and platform to influence their own cultural, social, economic and political development. Commercial advertisements are restricted on community radio stations such that the kinds of advertisements permitted are those with a social message that targets the host community. This restriction means that a certain revenue stream for the community radio stations is legally blocked. This leaves the community radio stations in a difficult situation where they have to popularize their stations‘ programming menu with the expectation that social marketers would prefer them over the financially well-endowed commercial radio stations when it comes to advertising their products.

**4.4.3 Narrow Geographical Reach**

Community radio stations‘ geographical reach is limited as the radio is expected to be targeting a local audience close to its transmission location. This effectively limits the number of listeners the radio can attract. When one considers that community radio stations are restricted on the type of advertisements they can carry on their stations, it becomes easy to understand the magnitude of the challenge that community radio stations have to surmount. Yet the life and strength of any radio station lies in the number of dedicated loyal listeners; such that the higher the number of listeners, the more likely that the radio station will attract sponsorships and financial support for many of its radio programmes. This lack of a firm financial base predisposes community radio stations to financial instability; a weakness that makes it difficult for many community radio stations to attract and hold on to skilled members of staff; buy, install and maintain state-of-the- art broadcast and transmission equipment and machinery; gather, package and present news and features; and generally undertake whatever programmes that the station may deem critical to its mandate.

A common complaint from the respondents to this study at Afemai Newspaper was the frequent electric power outages. The station did not have ample resources to install a standby back-up electric power generation system and this was eroding the confidence that listeners, particularly the less committed have in the station. The consequence of course is that such listeners would seek out and patronize alternative radio stations.

**4.4.4 Limited Community Participation**

―Community radio is not only seen as offering information and programming to engaged listeners – a further part of community radio‘s attraction is that community radio operates on a collaborative model that actively encourages the community to participate in the operation and decision-making of the station‖ (Wits Justice Project,2013). This assertion captures succinctly the ideal relationship between a community radio station and its targeted audience. However, the situation in many cases may not conform to this ideal.

The history of community radio is of a community identifying the need to have a radio station that can articulate their concerns and advocating for the improvement in their social, economic, political and such other human developmental issues of importance to the local community. Ideally therefore, the community would own the radio station collectively and would do all that needs to be done to ensure that the station stays on air and delivers on its mandate. Experiences elsewhere show host communities getting closely involved in the activities of their community radio station in a number of ways; including volunteering their time and professional knowledge and skills to the station to augment the work done by staff at the station. Also, the community would actively be involved in fundraising activities to support the community radio‘s programmes.

**4.4.5 Political Interference**

As community radio stations seek ways and means of financially sustaining their programmes and operations, they are exposed to a number of potentially detrimental situations. The struggle to remain a float has forced some community radio stations to look for all ways and means of sustaining their operations; some of which may bring into play competing and or conflicting interests. Knowing the power of broadcast media over the masses and desiring to control the content of a radio station in order to further their own personal political agenda, politicians would not shy away from seizing the opportunity afforded by the financial vulnerability prevailing at most community radio stations. Although not done openly, the political class is known to have control over a number of media houses (including radio stations) in Nigeria through their proxies.

In the case of Afemai Newspaper, a prominent local politician had supported the station at the time of its inception by sourcing for funds to buy them a set of radio transmission equipment. When the management of the radio station declined to bend to the politician‘s demands and whims, he repossessed the donated equipment thereby crippling the radio station‘s capacity to effectively transmit its broadcasts. And of course the management and staff of Afemai Newspaper are constantly under threat from politicians particularly when they are on trail of a story that is likely to link the politicians to activities or malpractices that would call into questions their ethics and or integrity as public officers or leaders. This scenario clearly threatens to jeopardize the need for community radio stations to maintain their identity of purity and remaining true to the mandate of community broadcasting i.e. independence, community service, community participation, community ownership and not-for-profit.

**CHAPTER FIVE**

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study was carried out to ascertain the extent of selected newspaper‟ reportage of rural development, realizing the implications which rural development have for national development. The study determined the reportage of rural development issues in Nigeria within a period of two years (2009 and 2011). The study investigated the extent of social responsibility displayed by selected newspapers in reporting the issues. The newspapers selected for the study is Afemai newspaper. It was discovered that agricultural development stories and infrastructural development stories were the most reported by the selected newspapers. Cultural stories accounted for the least coverage by the selected newspapers. It was also observed that all the selected newspapers made use of the straight news format most often than the other journalistic genres. By way of general placement of stories, the newspapers gave less prominence to rural development stories by placing the majority of the stories on inside pages. The selected newspapers placed insignificant premium on rural issues as evident in the inadequate placement of stories on front pages and paucity of in-depth and interpretative analysis of issues. Also, the selected newspapers devoted a considerable percentage of their overall rural development oriented stories to agricultural development and infrastructural development. The Nigerian press as an institution or organ is expected to report all or every sector of the Nigerian economy with sufficient attention on each sector. This becomes necessary because each sector of the economy is of equal importance to the development of the Nigerian society. As observed in the study, it would be necessary for the Nigerian press to give equal attention to all sectors of rural development. Congruent to the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1.Community newspapers should be established for the primary aim of canvassing and monitoring development policies and projects including focusing attention on the development needs of the rural people.

2.Every newspaper house should create development desk just as there exist foreign, sports, business desks, among others. With this, there will be increased coverage of development activities.

3.Correspondents should be employed from amongst the rural people. They should be trained and made to cover their areas.

Furthermore, the press should adequately utilize its developmental function for the positive change and development of the rural sector.

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