

RADIO AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: A LOOK AT “ISSUES AND EVENTS” ON LIBERTY RADIO, KADUNA

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Abstract

Man, in his environment, is surrounded by many issues of concern. These stand in the way to hinder his development, progress and success. These issues could manifest economically, socially, psychologically or religiously. However, the level of effectiveness in resolving social problems is still an issue of concern, hence the use of participatory approaches to enable man become part of his own development which includes the use of radio. Incidentally, the conventional radio has often been defined as a medium which adopts a top-down approach of communication since radio programmes, most often, do not involve the listeners, coupled with the fact that it defines itself as a profit-making institution. Therefore, the focus of this paper is to project the conventional radio as a medium that can also be used to achieve social development, with particular emphasis on the programme: “Issues and Events” by Liberty Radio, Kaduna. Using the Democratic Media Theory and the Democratic Participant Media Theory, findings show that listeners to the programme have the opportunity of participating in the different issues raised in the programme because they are consulted on the issues that are of utmost concern to them, thus breaking the barrier of the top-down method of the conventional radio. Part of the submission of this paper is that the conventional radio should not be overlooked as it also possesses potentials for development not just in rural communities but also in urban areas.

Introduction

Nigeria, in the last fifty-eight years, has been battling with the problem of development in spite of her huge human, material and natural resources. This development it craves for is critical and essential to the sustenance and growth of any nation. It justifies why Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011:238) argue that a country is classified as developed when it is able to provide qualitative life for its citizenry. This quality life can be realizable when communication channels facilitate information dissemination as it concerns the need of the people. The radio, thus, has a huge role to play in bringing about the needed development. This paper will lay emphasis on radio, with specific emphasis on Liberty Radio, Kaduna.

The Concept of Participation and Development

Development encompasses many aspects of human endeavour. This is because it is never consistent. Moreover, there are various ways to comprehend the concept. In this spotlight, Nkereuwem (1998:8) asserts that development is a multifaceted and normative concept meaning different things to different people. It is often referred to by some scholars as a multidimensional process involving economic as well as social and environmental changes. Against this background, one may want to ask what development is or how some scholars argue out their perceptions regarding development in order to find appropriate meaning to the concept.

Rodney, (1973:1) defines development as a many-sided process. At the individual level, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility, and material well-being. Based on the above, development can be seen as a concerted effort of the majority of the people to enhance their living condition. In that regard, Rogers (1976:32) sees development as a widely participatory process of change in the society intended to bring about social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom and other valued qualities for the majority of the people through their gaining control over their environment). Besides, stressing the endogenous dimension of development, he also observes that the participation in question should be the participation of the majority of the people.

Historically, Melkote (1991:20) observes that development as a concept came to popular use after the Second World War. At that time, scholars such as Arturo Escobar, Daniel Walter and the likes held on to the fact that the historical product of development can be traced to the statement of former United States president, Harry Truman, in his consolidation of US Hegemony in 1945. During that period, the US saw the need to expand the market for its products and the need to find new sites for investment of US surplus capital. The outcome of this is what is called development.

Truman, on his part, considers development to mean greater production and the complete or over-reliance in the use of science and technology. Another thing to note is that his statement created a divide between the privileged (haves) countries and the less-privileged (have nots) countries. This engendered the move to grow the developing countries, also known as the Third World Countries. As a result of the above, the term *development* needs to be redefined, otherwise it would be regarded as economic development which, in a holistic sense, is an aspect or a fraction of development.

Conversely, the modern concept of development sees development as substantial improvement in people's quality of life, access to education, health care, employment opportunities, availability of clean air and safe drinking water and even access to security (Burkey, 1993:26). One would, therefore, agree that development in this era of massive transformation transcends the economic trafficator to include social life, and other indices that create comfort to man and his environment. However, it is debatable to ascertain whether this has been achieved or not in the developing countries of the world.

Despite all these developments, decades (from the modernization to the alternative paradigm), social issues still hold sway, hence a shift towards harmonization and unification of the strengths of both the developed and the developing countries to evolve a 'symbiotic development paradigm' that is inclusive and beneficial to all peoples. It is within this framework of mutual development which aims at uprooting global inequalities, poverty and top-down development intervention and replace them with development that is based on pluralism and more involvement, leading to sustainable progress, that this paper hopes to anchor.

Hence, for the purpose of this paper, development is captured as a participatory process of human, material, social and psychological transformation of man and his society which focuses on providing sustainable comfort in the society with respect to communication and culture. This is because development cuts across various people, cultures, beliefs and ideas that are not synonymous. However, it can be ascertained when there is harmony in influencing change. It is worthy to note that any attempt to discuss social issues on radio without the inclusion of listeners, who serve as the audience, is futile. It is, therefore, pertinent to note that participation is relevant in development intervention in that it transforms a society and sustains good behaviour. The idea of participation sprang up due to the fact that in the 1970s, scholars from Latin America began to deconstruct the dominant paradigm and modernization development communication paradigm of development. This led to the introduction of an alternative model of development that is more participatory.

Guijt & Shah (1998:1) defined participation as a process of involvement of socially and economically marginalized people in decision-making over their own lives. In other words, it means the people are supposed to determine the kind of change they want at any given time. Thus, for participation to be effective, there is the need for proper communication. The involvement of the people leads to development. Communication, participation and development can indivisibly be described within the concept of trinity. This suggests that the absence of one may render the end process of the development futile, thus explaining further that the exclusion of the beneficiaries in any development intervention would make

them passive and less-productive. When people participate through dialogue, they better understand themselves and collectively address issues in befitting ways.

In brief, it is important to note that the role of participation in development is highly debatable in terms of its final meaning. But for the purpose of this paper, participation will be defined as a process of engaging people and attracting a collective resolution of social issues or maintaining good behaviour for the purpose of advancement.

Radio, Social Development and the National Broadcast Code

Social development during the 1960s and 1970s looked at development mainly on the social infrastructure to support economic development. This, according to Sakamoto, (2002:5) corresponds with mainstream development.

Baliane (1997) is therefore of the view that:

Social development is the promotion of a sustainable society that is worthy of human dignity by empowering marginalized groups, women and men to undertake their own development, to improve their social and economic position and to acquire their rightful place in society.

From the above, one can deduce that the objectives of social development are to ensure poverty eradication, full employment and social integration usually achieved through a cross fertilization of ideas and a harmonized dialogue to induce a desired change. Accordingly, social development as a movement addresses social issues in the society. This means that whenever a discussion is brought forward regarding social issues, what keeps firm in mind is the numerous societal problems, uncertainties or conflicts that are not beneficial to the lives of the public. One can then deduce that social issues are the already existing or the uprising problems the society faces on daily basis before approaching or attempting to resolve them. Hence, unless social issues are addressed in the society, social development may be difficult to come by. Nigeria has adopted some strategies and approaches to salvage the situation and made life more comfortable for the citizens. This is contained in the global perspective for the resolution of social issues as packaged in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the year 2000. Unfortunately, available evidence shows that most, if not all, countries in Africa have not achieved the MDGs. It can, therefore, be said that despite the positive promises recorded before the MDGs interventions were carried out, much needs to be done in terms of addressing the most pressing development issues that will lead to sustainable development. The need to adopt the alternative (radio) is, therefore, crucial.

Radio plays a very significant role in the development of both rural and urban areas of any society. Several problems are, however, associated with the use of radio as a tool for rural development in Nigeria. This is contained in the words of Asemah et al (2013: 7) thus:

Communication related problems, message related problems, illiteracy, the use of English language by the electronic media, multiplicity of languages in Nigeria, lack of audience, feedback, ownership problem, dearth of qualified personnel, urban-centered journalism and dearth of community or vernacular radio/telecommunication.

These issues continue to serve as impediments to the propagation of development through radio despite the fact that it is a versatile medium of communication that can be used for the benefit of the society. Radio has also been considered as a conventional medium that cannot be used to achieve development because of the fact that messages are planned, prepared and sent to receivers who play the functional role of mere consumers of radio messages and, by so doing, a larger number of listeners are disengaged.

However, despite all these, the role of the radio in airing issues on social development has been clearly stipulated in the National Broadcasting Code. This, however, is one of the approaches adopted by the Nigerian government to deal with social issues.

The Nigerian Broadcasting Code (2010:10) states that “broadcasting shall influence society positively, setting the agenda for the social, cultural, economic, political and technological development of a nation for public good”. In addition, by means of broadcasting, every Nigerian is expected to partake in the sharing of ideas and experiences that will enrich his/her life and help him/her live in a complex, dynamic and humane society envisaged in chapter two of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In the same vein, the Nigerian Broadcasting Code, under Social Objectives, states that “broadcasting organizations shall recognize that they exercise freedom of expression as agents of the society not for personal or sectional rights, privileges, needs of their own or of their proprietors, relatives, friends or supporters”. From the above, it is evident that the NBC Code was built on the platform of participation, freedom of expression, addressing social issues and the promotion of social development.

However, it has been observed that participation and social development contents as emphasized by the NBC has not been adhered to by most radio stations; and even though some stations try to adhere to the afore-mentioned by broadcasting programmes (discussion, drama and variety) that reflect social issues, the listeners’ level of participation in most of these stations is passive. This is because listeners contribute to the programme by way of writing letters, mails, social media and studio audience, hence the people neither take charge

nor are they consulted through audience research analysis to the nature of issues to be discussed. In line with the above, “Issues and Events” which is a programme aired in Liberty Radio shall be discussed in relation to the people’s participation in the pre-production, production and the post production stage of the programme. The people of Narayi Highcost Metropolis, which is one of the populated areas in Kaduna State, shall be used as a case study.

Theoretical Framework

This paper will be underpinned on the Development Media Theory and the Democratic Participant Media Theory. The development media theory was formulated by Mc Quail in 1987. This theory seeks to explain the normative behaviours of the press in countries that are conventionally classified together as developing countries. The theory owes its origin to UNESCO’s Mac Bride Commission set up in 1979. This theory is opposed to the dependency and foreign domination and to arbitrary authoritarianism. It accepts economic development and nation building as overriding objectives. Press freedom should be open to restriction according to economic priorities and the development needs of the society in the interest of development ends (Ndolo, 2015).

Furthermore, the theory holds that the media have a role to play in facilitating the process of development in the developing countries. According to the development media theory, the media is to be used to serve the general good of the nation. The media are seen as agents of development and social change in any community, thus the theory says that the media should be used to complement government’s efforts by carrying out programmes that will lead to positive behavioural change among the people. The theory advocates that the media should assist the government in the task of nation-building. Hence, the theory is relevant to this paper because it lays emphasis on the media serving as a tool to complement government’s effort in developing the society. This implies that the media have the capacity to positively affect the society because, for development to be achieved, the people whom the development is meant for have to be involved in the process of wielding the process. To achieve this, interviews were carried out on the people of Narayi Highcost in Kaduna State as to how the media with emphasis on the radio has been used to achieve development using the programme ‘Issues and Events’ by Liberty Radio Kaduna.

Democratic Participant Media Theory

The idea of Democratic Participant Theory was started by grass-root level media in the 1960s. It emerged because of the dissatisfaction with other models such as Libertarian Theory, Social Responsibility Theory, etcetera. The democratic participant theory believes that there is democratic and professional hegemony in the media today and the media is

totally commercial. All these ill-practices should be removed from the media in order for them to be democratic and easily accessible or participatory. It discourages monopolization of the press and top-down approach in the media. The press should be pluralistic, decentralized, bottom-up or horizontal and must have equality. The major concept is participation and circular communication. Hence, this theory places greater emphasis on the receivers. In addition, Tickner (2001:34) observed that:

An important element of democratic participation is the ability of citizens to independently and critically examine evidence and conduct their own studies, asking questions relevant to themselves. Community-based research is designed to serve and empower the community. Communities participate in identifying and defining the problems, initiating research, considering local expertise, observations and knowledge, formulating action plans and initiating preventive action.

Based on the above, the goal of Democratic Participation in any development intervention can be described as enhancing the potential for citizens to become part of the decision-making process rather than being victims of the decisions made by some external agencies or institutions. From this assertion, the theory will create a room whereby community members will become active participants in the decision-making process rather than just passive recipients or victims of a decision made by the media.

The theory further considers local information, feedbacks and social action at community level to be the roles of the media. The theory makes interaction between the media and the audience possible and also encourages feedback and equality among genders and classes in the society. The major features of this theory include the following:

- Encouraging horizontal and bottom-up approach in media
- Media has a supportive rather than critical role.
- Government controls some aspects, if media does not act as it should in process of registration, licensing and censorship by preparing guidelines for media monitoring.
- Participation and interaction of media and audience (as both are from the same group of population)
- There are concepts of equality, inclusion and equal access which make it eliminate marginalization.

This theory is handy to this paper because it encourages the participation and inclusion of everyone in the society in the issues that affect them. To crown it all, proponents of Democratic Participant Theory argue that above all considerations, individual citizens and minority groups deserve to be served not only with the right information through the right

medium but also assure their right to participate in the process and be served according to the determination of needs. Based on the above assertions, therefore, this theory was used to guide the study on the need for people's participation in programmes and interventions that concern their own development.

“Issues and Events” on Liberty Radio Kaduna

Liberty Radio Kaduna, also known by its name “Voice for All”, hit the airwaves on the 11th of January 2012, with the mission statement: “To create a platform that will promote the value of education, entertainment, enlightenment, information, justice and liberty, where all voices will be heard”. To this end, “Issues and Events” was introduced so as to accord a platform to all voices on topical issues as they affect them.

According to Liberty Radio handout (2012), the mission statement of Liberty Radio 91.7FM, Kaduna, is “to create a platform that will promote the value of education, entertainment, enlightenment, information, justice, truth, freedom of expression and liberty, where all voices will be heard” This is to say that participation is key in the station's in-house policy as is called “voice for all” where there is equal dissemination and receiving of media contents in a more participatory manner. Hence, failure of the audience to participate actively will alter the efficacy of freedom or giving voice to the voiceless.

The programme “Issues and Events” lasts for one hour. It is broadcast live on Liberty Radio 91.7FM, Kaduna. The broadcast is between 8:00am-9:00am. According to the producer of the programme (Mr. Toyin Alabi), the topics that are discussed on the programme include politics, health, agriculture, empowerment and governance. Aside from the fact that listeners participate through phone-in, text messages and Whatsapp, it is recorded that the people are consulted on the issues that affect them most. These become the topics for discussion in subsequent programmes.

Discussion of Findings

This study was restricted to Chikun Local Government, precisely the people of Narayi Highcost. The area was chosen because of the influx and congregation of diverse ethnic groups residing there. Few people who make up the active listeners of the station were interviewed on the extent to which they participate in the programme “Issues and Events”. One of the respondents observed that the radio has indeed become a potentially participative tool because listeners, according to her, are becoming the real content of radio. She stated thus:

Issues and Events is a programme I cannot afford to miss because of the fact that topical issues that concern us as individuals are discussed. Most times,

before a fresh episode is aired, the producer asks us to suggest an issue discussion. This is mostly done through calls, and the issues that are discussed, as far as I know, are always what we ask for. **(Interview with Miss Titi on the 29th of December, 2015)**

Again, Mr Friday, a civil servant, noted that the electronic media, in recent times, have become user-friendly. He went ahead to state that ‘the user is content’. What he meant from the above is that the radio now has a radical potential as a social medium. He stated further:

More and more people have started to become collaborators through the media. Radio is a tool and the public are now respected rather than given content in a top-down fashion. In fact, different avenues are open for us to send our contributions. And aside from that, we are the ones to decide the topic that goes on air. **(Interview with Mr. Friday on the 2nd of January, 2016)**

From the above, one can see that listeners act as producers. The above is in line with Benjamin’s (1932) analysis because it reminds us that social participation/production is pertinent in a society that wants to develop.

Even more, Mrs. Uzor further observed that:

For the first time in the history of radio, its audience—once invisible, private and passive—has been deeply transformed into public actors, visible, networked, and audible. Thanks to the stage offered to them by social networking where we are given the opportunity to contribute to the issues that affect us directly. **(Interview with Mrs. Uzor on the 3rd of January, 2016)**

As against what was obtainable before, it has become clear that the public does not only give feedback; they are publicly and mutually connected.

Also, a media practitioner in the person of Mr. Yahaya Mohammed also explained that the public who have been termed invisible are now audible. They listen to and, at the same time, take part in conversations. He defined the public as a makeup of individuals who are linked in a network and who listen to and take part in conversations. Now, if they don’t like a show, they can express their comments as against what Walter, (1932:6) underlined “publics can do nothing but switch off the radio”.

Concerning the extent to which they have fulfilled their mission statement which focuses on “voice for all”, Mr Yahaya went ahead to state thus:

“I would say that Liberty Radio has, to a large extent, fulfilled their mission statement because the people from the grassroot level are consulted”.

Mr. Godfrey, a student, further explained:

Radio producers do not have to look for contents as they did in the twentieth century. Contents come to them, they are “everywhere”. Their job is no longer to seek but to select. They do not have to know everything, they only have to keep an eye out for interesting material and decide what to use and what to discard. As listeners, we comment and supply new material to the community of listeners/producers so that the process can start again.

(Interview with Mr. Godfrey on the 4th of January, 2015)

He further explained that the producer of “Issues and Events” consults them before discussing any social issue during the programme. He stated that “aside the fact that we are consulted during the pre-production stage, we are also consulted in the production stage which is in form of calling and participating in the programme”.

In all, it can be said that listeners to the programme “Issues and Events” also contribute in the various processes of the production. Therefore, the barrier which is associated with the conventional radio has been deconstructed in a way that the listeners participate fully in the programmes of the station as a whole. The situationist dream of breaking down the boundary between media producers and consumers is partly achieved. Though, the public are still not visible they have become audible.

Conclusion:

In brief, it is pertinent to note that the use of the conventional radio in bringing about social development is possible but certain measures still need to be put in place. These measures are the necessary communication methods that help development to a large number of people. Hence, the programme “Issues and Events” has proven that the conventional radio which was known for passing information to the public in a top-down way has been deconstructed in a manner that the listeners are the miners extracting the raw material (comments, notes, etcetera) that are then refined, processed or elaborated by the producer. The producer in turn adds value to the contents supplied by the listeners by giving a dramaturgical shape to the contents by linking them to a complex architecture of sense-based dramaturgical rules. Thus, there exist a boundary between willing participation and commercial exploitation.

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