

Chapter 3

Evaluating the Development Potentials of Community Radio

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ABSTRACT

Most developing nations lack the means of disseminating worthwhile information required for physical and human development. This, particularly, has contributed to the issue of marginalisation and low development Africa. This study, examined the development challenges facing most Third World countries, the media options available, and identified community radio as most vital to development. The study utilized the Democratic-Participant and the Development Media theories and evaluated the effectiveness of community radio through literature search, interview, observation, and empirical survey of the programming and operations of the University of Lagos community radio. Findings indicated that community radios are efficient means of carrying development messages to the grassroots. This idea is realized through participation in conception, packaging and communication of information. This in-turn serves to engender community development process through the provision of localized information, training and skills. These qualities delineate this radio form as distinct from other media form.

AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES, INFORMATION MARGINALISATION AND MEDIA OPTIONS

Most Third World nations suffer from lack of crucial infrastructures and facilities like good roads, electricity, water, health care, education, good shelter, and food, which have negatively affected their existence. This is amidst the depressing milieu of inefficient means of disseminating meaningful information vital among the apparatus essential for physical and human development. Mutume (2003:17) states, "Africa has the fewest telephone lines, radios, television sets, computers and internet users of any part of the world", which are vital channels of communication. Each medium aforementioned, according to Mutume, is a mode used to package and transmit information and knowledge. These, he explained, are broadly referred to as Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), and they are utilities necessary for development. What this infers is that any medium of communication that can be electronically enabled

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to package, transmit and receive information is an aspect of ICT because this requires the use electricity and electronic gadgets to facilitate its operation (Olugboji, 2014).

Thus, Mutume asserts that communication is a condition for community, nay national development. Hence, the question of inadequate relevant information can hinder the people from overcoming constraints of individual or societal development. However, there has to be a solution to these critical situations.

In history, many development strategies have been propounded and executed as latitude out of such situation, but it must be stated that modest successes have been recorded. This has largely contributed to the issue of marginalisation and low development, particularly in the Third World of which nations of Africa represent a larger proportion. Be that as it may, there has to be an endeavour to reduce the number of the marginalized people within communities, and the apparently isolated majority in the interiors who have no entrée to information (for development) and the necessities of life. The question then is: What is the way out?

According to a *One World* publication (2006:1), access to ICTs “will ultimately enable the people of developing countries increase ability for economic growth and empowerment.” The body argued that this will facilitate an increased access to education, which is a way through which citizens can be well-informed regarding their country and “offer greater credibility and support for their researchers and developers and an eventual narrowing of the digital divide.” The ‘digital divide’ is a gap that exists between those who have access to units of ICTs and those who do not. It also refers to marginalisation in the information dissemination process that affects needed development, and refers to the gulf that exists between the underdeveloped and the developed nations (Olugboji, 2014).

Examining the aspects or modes of ICTs, this study identifies radio as the most potent, simply because of the fact that it is a sure way of reaching out to the people within the interiors of a country or community. Radio broadcasting, as a medium of ICT, is very influential and relevant in the developing countries, and it has remained the chief persuasive organ through which information is channeled to the generality of the people (Olugboji, 2014). The importance of radio in Nigeria, for example, can be measured through the broad assortment of its audience. Studies have signified that although about 60% of the population might not have access to television, at least 70% may possibly boast of a transistor radio. This is because of the ubiquitous nature of radio. It is a technology that is an indispensable part of existence, and no society can do without it.

Radio attends to the needs of the people because of its special activity as a medium of disseminating news, entertainment, norms or ideas. It is pervasive and penetrates virtually all areas because its signals travel at about 300,000 kilometres per second. It is affordable and portable and does not essentially entail electricity to receive its messages. The messages from the source to the receiver or destination are instant because it is a synchronized activity, thereby allowing people, irrespective of location, to get relaxed through music, talk shows, information and news as he or she listens to the radio. As an aspect

Table 1. Unit access to the various components of ICTs in Africa

Total Population: 800 Million People (Africa)				
Access/Statistics	1 in 4 200 million	1 in 13 62 million	1 in 40 24 million	1 in 160 11 million
Unit of ICTs	Radio	Television	Telephone	Computer/Internet

Sourced from ITU; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Statistics.

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