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Full Length Review Article

IMPACT OF THE BROADCAST MEDIA COMMERCIALISATION ON AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the impact of broadcast media commercialisation on agriculture and rural development in Nigeria. It highlights the importance of radio and television in the dissemination of agricultural technology and other useful information for rural development to the teeming farm families across the country, in complementing the ineffective extension services. However, the paper observed that inspite of the immense contributions of the broadcast media to agriculture and rural development, the commercial nature of the media industry now posed a serious challenge to this development. Hence, it is recommended that the federal government through Nigerian broadcasting commission should legislate on free air time for all agricultural and rural development programmes on radio and television in the country. Also, seasoned agricultural communicators should be employed to serve as gate keepers for agricultural programmes in the broadcast stations.

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INTRODUCTION

Agriculture has been described as the mainstay of economic growth in Africa. It is the single largest contributor to the wellbeing of the rural poor in Nigeria, sustaining 90% and 70% of the rural and total labour force respectively (Akpabio, 2005). Despite the pivotal role of agriculture in the nation's economy, it contributes only 38% of the GDP (Gross Domestic Product). In Nigeria, agriculture is expected to play the following roles

- Provide food for the people with the aim of attaining self sufficiency in food production and enhancing food security.
- Provide raw materials for the local industries. This is a prerequisite for the expansion of the industrial based generation of employment and income for the country.
- Provide the much needed fund for the development of the country through the exportation of the agricultural produce such as cocoa, kolanut, palmoil and arable crops such as maize, cowpea and soybean.
- Provide employment for majority of rural dwellers not only by working directly on the farms, but also through the

establishment of agro-processing industries to export semi-processed materials.

- Transform the rural communities –Farm settlements were established in many parts of the old western states to transform the rural areas.

Due to the importance of this sector, agriculture was placed on the concurrent list in the country's policy formulation (Federal, State, local), the private sector as well as Non-Governmental Organisations have specified role to play to ensure the realisation of the above roles. Over the years, successive governments in Nigeria had embarked on a number of programmes aimed at transforming agriculture and rural development. These programmes include the National Accelerated Food Production Project (NAFPP), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution Project (GRP), Agricultural Development Programmes (ADP), Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructural (DFRRI), Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) among others. The performance of Nigeria's rural development and the extension services which generally referred to as the kingpin in the entire mechanism of agricultural development strategy have not been particularly satisfactory. More so, the poor funding of the ADPs as a result of the withdrawal of the world bank counterpart funding of the extension service in Nigeria has reduced the effectiveness of extension services to farmers (Adebayo, 1988).

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The recognition of the inadequacies of interpersonal communication strategy which involves the use of extension agents has lent credence to the emergence of broadcast media support (mass communication) in development process (Yahaya, 2001). For example, in agriculture, home economics and rural development the problem of limited number of change agents or development facilitators serving millions of development beneficiaries justify the need for media support. While FAO recommends one extension agent to 800 farmers, the ratio in Nigeria gives an average of 1:1968 (Ihimodu, 2002). The use of broadcast media is therefore inevitable if any progress is to be quickly achieved.

Objectives

This paper examines the impact of broadcast media (Radio and Television) commercialisation on agriculture and rural development in Nigeria. Specifically the paper

- Examines the history of broadcasting in Nigeria
- Review the contribution of farm broadcast programmes to agricultural and rural development.
- Makes a case for free air time for agricultural programmes on air.
- Makes a case for encouragement of broadcast media use in agriculture alongside extension agents.
- Advocates for the use of experts (professional agricultural communicators) in the presentation of agricultural programmes on radio and television.
- Identifies common information needs of the rural dwellers.

History of broadcasting in Nigeria

Before we dwell in to the history of broadcast industry in Nigeria; let us attempt to know what broadcast journalism is? Broadcast journalism has to do with the transmission of information through the radio waves from a radio or television station, to the audience in far and near places, through their receivers which help in decoding such information (Onabajo, 2000). Radio broadcasting was introduced to Nigeria by the then British Colonial authorities in 1932. The task then was to relay the overseas service of the BBC through the wired systems with loud speakers called Radio Diffusion System (RDS). The radio diffusion system became the Nigerian Broadcasting System (NBS) in April 1st, 1957 which was later converted to Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation by act of parliament. In 1978, the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation was re-organised to become the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN). Television broadcasting started with the initiative of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the first premier of western region who launched television broadcasting on 31st October, 1959 in Ibadan.

With a small 500 watts transmitter mounted on Mapo hill in Ibadan and another at Abafon, western region government commenced operations in partnership with British Media Rediffusion Limited. The western Nigeria Radio vision service limited was also created. The east and the north soon copied the initiative of the west with the establishment of the Eastern Nigeria Broadcasting Service and the Broadcasting Company of Northern Nigeria in 1960 and 1962 respectively. In 1976, television stations in the country started beaming colour programmes. By 1978, the federal government owned television stations were made to beam network programmes.

In 1992, a new vista was opened in the annals of Nigerian broadcasting history. The President and Commander in Chief then, General Ibraheem Babangida by decree NO38 of 1992 approved the right of ownership of broadcast media.

Concept of Rural Broadcasting

Rural broadcasting is a recent concept in Nigerian broadcasting history and it is a phenomenon that is prevalent in the developing or emerging world. The concept takes cognisance of the larger percentage of the rural population when compared with the urban residents. Mabogunje (1981) contends that about 70% of Nigerians reside in the rural areas, indirectly hinting that the concept of development can only be looked at from the perspective of rural development. Onabajo (2002) opined that development that does not include attitudinal change that will respect the dignity of labour and the propensity towards social change and a self reliant economy is at best incomplete. Rural education is a subset of rural development and rural broadcasting can only but have one major focus which is that of transmitting developmental information to educate the rural citizenry with overall intention of developing their wellbeing, through introducing innovative ideas that will stimulate them to action. Rural development projects employing rural broadcasting should be made relevant to the needs of the societies. The use of local leaders has been discovered to be very effective (Onabajo, 1995). The local leaders should not be jettisoned in any rural developmental efforts because of their capability to aid or block the communication process. The nation's rural communities have been identified as not only the source of the country's food basket, but also the source of raw materials supply for the industrial sector (Amusat, 2012). Hence, different agricultural programmes aimed at improving agricultural production and rural development was embarked upon.

Commercialisation of broadcast media and its impact on farm broadcast programmes

The introduction of the state-wide, World bank funded Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs), marked a watershed in the use of radio and television for agricultural extension delivery in Nigeria. With the external support, all the ADPs nationwide were able to established well equipped Development Supports Unit, which had video, television and radio recording facilities. Most of the broadcast houses provided free air time for the radio and television farm broadcasts of their respective ADPs. The ADPs also took the advantage of the free air time of the federal radio located in their states. Virtually, all the ADPs produced and aired radio and television programmes on agriculture. With the commercialisation, the frequency of both the television and radio programmes of the ADPs dropped appreciably. As contained in the 2011 report of Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, a survey by National Agricultural Extension Research Liaison Services, Ahmadu Bello University and Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in 2012 showed that only 26(70.3%) of the 36 states ADPs produced and aired radio programmes while only 48.6% produced and aired television programmes of which 57.7% were in local languages. These figures are even lower today because of the exorbitant charges for air time. The word commercial broadcasting implies that media organisations are

setup for the purpose of making money and generating funds to meet the financial requirements of the media organisations. On July 7, 1992 the federal government through its federal ministry of information and culture gave the official nod for full commercialisation of NTA and FRCN. What this means within the stipulation of the law empowering it is that government will continue in its endeavour to provide funds to meet the capital requirements of these stations, while the stations are expected to find alternative sources of revenue for their day-to-day needs. After this guideline was rolled out to the federal government owned media in Nigeria, the states owned media were also mandated to follow suit. Since a commercialised radio or television stations depend largely on the volume of advertisements or the amount that can be garnered from the sales of air time, the cost of their services skyrocketed and went beyond the reach of agricultural agencies. The resultant effect is the reduction in the number of farm broadcast programmes on radio and television channels which the masses especially the rural populace relied on for their day to day information.

Without gainsaying, broadcast media have become an important means of agricultural information dissemination in Nigeria. The first radio programme in farming which was titled Agbemase (I will take to farming) was first broadcast in Nigeria by the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service (WNBS) in 1963. Since then a lot of other agricultural agencies have been packaging different agricultural programmes on radio and television. The survey jointly carried out by NAERLS and the PCU has revealed that with the commercialisation of broadcasting in Nigeria, the media houses may not be too willing to give free air time and government which is the largest employer of Village Extension Agents may also not be able to sustain huge investments in farm broadcasts programming. Presently, most of the ADPs and other agricultural agencies are not liquid enough to run agricultural programmes either on the state or federal government owned stations. Hence, the need for National Broadcasting Commission to legislate on free air time for agricultural and rural development programmes on radio and television in Nigeria.

Common information needs of rural dwellers

Advocates of rural education strategies often point out that the crucial need of rural people is for more practical information that will help them improve the productivity of their land, enhance the quality of their diet and allow them to reduce the incidents of disease by adopting better health practises in the home. Though, such information has been customary being provided by extension agents but with little impact in the rural communities. According to Onu (1988), the performance of Nigeria's rural development and public extension services have not been particularly satisfactory. Audience of rural education programme varies in age, occupation, motivation and educational experiences and can be categorised according to their common information needs (Onabajo, 2012). They are;

- (a) Farmers seeking advice on how to improve the yields of their crops and the general quality of village life.
- (b) Mothers seeking information on how to safeguard the health of their children and advice on how to plan the size of their children.

- (c) Teachers, extension agents and other professionals working in the field and in need of continuing guidance and support.

People of all ages learning to read and write.

Conclusion

The paper examines the impact of broadcast media commercialisation on agricultural production and rural development in Nigeria. The paper placed premium on the use of radio and television as complement to the poor extension service in the country and categorised rural dwellers based on their common information needs. Since agricultural and rural development are necessary ingredients for the take off of all other sectors of the nation's economy (Amusat, 2000). The government at all levels should encourage production of quality farm broadcast programmes and guarantee free flow of information to the rural areas. This can be achieved through;

- Democratisation of the media: The rural people need to be involved in the packaging of the programmes meant for them.
- Classification of agricultural and other rural programmes as enlightenment programmes by Nigerian Broadcasting Commission. Such programmes through legislation should be made to enjoy free air time from the media industry.
- Employment of seasoned agricultural communicators as gatekeepers for agricultural programmes on radio and television stations.

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