

POTENTIALS OF COMMUNITY RADIO AS A TOOL FOR DISSEMINATING AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to discuss the potentials of community radio as a tool for disseminating agricultural information. It reviewed and compared agricultural extension through the use of inter-personal contact between extension agent and farmers and agricultural extension through the use of radio broadcast. The paper also highlighted the concept of community radio, community radio for agricultural development and challenges to community radio in Nigeria. This paper advocates that Agricultural agencies, non-governmental organizations and development professionals should take advantage of the opportunities that community radio can provide in boosting food production in the country.

Keywords: Agricultural extension, inter-personal contact, community radio

Introduction

Information is a critical tool in agricultural production. Agricultural information is provided through extension services, by either the government or non-governmental organizations. Extension services provide a channel where farmers can learn about recommended alternatives to theirs for better yields and more income. The most effective method of providing agricultural information to farmers in the country is through inter-personal contact. Personal contact brings about face to face interactions between the extension agent and farmers to help them adopt technologies for better yield.

Dimbleby (1993) in Alams and Dang (2010:15) sees inter-personal communication as between people. Usually this category is taken to refer to two people interacting face to face. Familiar interpersonal situations are interview, a sales person talking to a client, and a conversation between friends in a café. For Hybels and Weaver (2001) in Alams and Dang (2010:15) Interpersonal communication occurs when communication is on a one to one basis usually in an internal setting. In a conversation between friends for example, each brings his or her background and experience to the conversation. For instance, if an extension worker meets a Fulani herdsman, the herdsman freely discusses with him his experiences in managing his livestock. In the conversation, both the Fulani herdsman and the extension worker function as a sender and a receiver; it's done usually in an informal setting (environment).

Inter-personal communication can be seen from these perspectives:

- **Closeness:** This is not just in terms of physical space, but it emphasizes closeness between people. For instance an agricultural extension worker uses this type of communication to get close to the farmer. Engaging the farmers in a conversation,

delivering useful information and assisting them to adopt requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes to make use of this information or technology effectively.

- **Mutuality:** For dialogue to take place, two people have to be on the same level. In this case, when there is inter-person contact, the extension worker and the farmer get to understand themselves better.
- **Respect:** Once you are engaged in a conversation with someone where there is mutual relationship, you get to respect and understand each other's ideas and views.
- **Truthfulness:** It will always be difficult for both the farmer and the extension worker to hide the truth from each other when they are face- to-face.

Therefore in using inter-personal contact the agent acquaint himself with the farmers' problems and try to provide solutions. In so doing, the agent gains the confidence of his clients; this also provides the best means of securing their friendship and cooperation.

Despite these advantages, personal contact method of extension is constrained by its inability to reach many people when compared to mass media like radio. There are too many farmers to be visited and inter-personal contact cannot cope with these vast number. Bolarinwa and Oyeyinka (2011) agree with this fact when they reported that the extension ratio to farmers is 1: 3000 farm families in the country, making extension workers to reach an insignificant number of the projected clientele. This has had considerable effects on attempts at increasing food production.

This major constraint therefore makes it, imperative to consider a more effective means of communication to reach a greater segment of farmers. Omokore (1999) asserted that the radio is one of such means, apart from its affordability; it is capable of carrying messages to the audience no matter where they are, in their farms or

living rooms. Similarly Sharma (2011) stated that among the three main categories of mass communication tools for media, the importance of radio for agricultural extension cannot be denied. It beats obstacles such as poor roads, distance and time. Furthermore it can be powered by batteries and illiteracy is no barrier to radio messages as farm information can be delivered or taught in the audience's own language. This makes it easier for targeting individuals or a specific group of people.

Concept of Community Radio

Community radio is a type of radio service that caters for the interest of a certain area, broadcasting content that is popular to a local audience but which may often be overlooked by commercial or mass-media broadcasters (UNESCO, 2002) as cited by Sharma, (2011). Community radio is confined to a small geographical area. It depends on low power transmission covering not more than 20 – 30 kilometer radius Sharma, (2011). It serves a community which uses common resources of livelihood, has common development issues and concerns, which are relatively localized, nevertheless connected to national and regional development goals. Also according to Sharma (2011), community radio is a vibrant community broadcasting system to enhance pluralism and diversity.

It is a truly people's radio that perceives listeners not only as receivers and consumers, but also as active citizens and creative producers of media content. This form of radio is fully consistent with the letter and spirit of the Milan Declaration on communications media having a responsibility to help sustain the diversity of the world's cultures and languages and that they should be supported through legislative, administrative and financial measures. Community radio is distinguished by three essential principles. Non-profit making, community ownership and management, and community participation.

Community radio is also characterized by its limited local reach, low power transmission and programming content that reflects the educational, developmental and socio – cultural needs of the specific community it serves. For the purpose of community radio, a community is defined as a non – sectarian group of individuals who are traditionally bound and share a common socio-economic and cultural interest (Sharma, 2011).

Some Examples of Community Radio

- Farm Radio: This is an outfit of community radio broadcasting that targets the farmers. Farmers meet every time to listen to messages on new farming techniques which helps in

improving their yields. In Canada in 1941 to 1965 through the community radio, farmers met in groups each week to listen to special radio programmes on agricultural development.

- The campus radio by different tertiary institutions in Nigeria is a good example of community radio. Such radio is owned by the students and it is not for profit making. The students run the programmes of the radio, as such, information about agricultural development and the need for students to develop a positive habit towards agriculture can be inculcated to the students through agricultural programmes.

Community Radio for Agricultural Development

Farmers are always in need of specific information about where, when and how to obtain farming inputs such as fertilizer, pesticides, seeds, mechanical equipment through purchase or hiring etc. Agriculture has always been a highly knowledge – intensive sector requiring continuous information flow. The quest for authentic farm information that is credible and usable from established system and traditional practices emphasizes the importance of a more appropriate means of information delivery for agricultural development.

An appropriate means such as community radio can be used to persuade and motivate farmers to adopt improved technology for increased productivity and better farm income. Effective extension education and communication services are probably some of the key strategies for sustaining agricultural growth, strengthening food security and combating hunger and malnutrition. Agricultural extension is the vehicle or system for delivering useful information to farmers and assisting the farmers to adopt requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes to make use of information or technology effectively. In recent times, advancement in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTS) are revolutionizing agricultural extension by offering various technological options such as television, radio, internet etc.

Over the years the Nigerian government has employed various measures to ensure food security in the country. Abdul-Aziz et al (2011) stated that, this led to the establishment of National Agricultural Research Institutes (NARIs) and the state Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs). Also extension programmes and approaches were tried, at one time or the other to boost agricultural production. Despite being well – intentioned but were poorly implemented. Poor funding of Agricultural Development Programmes particularly at the state level, inadequate facilities and poor infrastructure affects negatively, the quality of extension services thereby making it difficult

to reach a large number of the target beneficiary and this poses a threat to food security.

The radio is a powerful communication tool. Realizing the great potentials of the radio as an extension tool, agricultural development agencies, government ministries and even some agro-allied companies make extensive use of radio in the dissemination of agricultural information as means of improving information flow to farmers. Mohammed and Olabode (2007), corroborated this fact when they reported that radio has been used by agricultural organizations to disseminate relevant agricultural information to large number of farm families at minimal cost and to areas hitherto not accessible to extension agents on a regular basis. The radio is the most important tool of mass media communication used in Kaduna State Omokore (1999). Also according to him there are radio receivers in almost every house hold in Kaduna state because of the advantages of the radio earlier mentioned.

Community radio is probably the best tool for getting information to illiterate and poor communities, as it requires neither reading skills nor money to buy newspaper. The impact of a community radio broadcasting in a local language or languages is incomparable.

There is therefore the need for more advocacies for the liberalization of the broadcasting licensing policy, to encourage community radio broadcasting. This type of participatory communication could be a tool for social and economic development at the grassroot level. The local community needs, which are often neglected by the mainstream media could be adequately addressed by community radio. Even farmer to farmer extension can be easily made possible through adequate capacity building and presented as a talk-show or programme. Extension agents can use community radio for disseminating information on new methods and techniques, giving information about improved varieties, land preparation, planting time, crop pest and diseases, weather, market news, livestock, post-harvest technologies, fisheries, irrigation, forestry horticulture, home economics, agricultural credit etc. for this purpose, talks, group discussions, folksongs, dialogues and dramas can be organized and presented through community radio for the development of agriculture.

Challenges to Community Radio

Community radio in Nigeria may likely face some challenges. One of such is participation from the people, without which no community radio can survive. Sharma (2011) noted that community radio demands 70% participation of the community people. Sharma (2011) opined that to ensure people participation essentially the leaders of the community: which include the elected and the religious authorities

as well as the informal but also influential opinion leaders must be part of consultation process. But equally important is a consultation process that involves the community at large.

Group discussion with various sections in the community like farmers, fishermen, shop-owners, teachers, students, artisans etc. is essential. It is also crucial to consult women and youths who are traditionally marginalized in many rural societies. Participation must also ensure that no minority, cultural and linguistic group is left out. The points to be ascertained are to know about listener's need, listener's preference and their listening habit.

Furthermore issues regarding effective and quality programme production, in terms of content, production quality and community involvement are challenges to deal with. In addition to this, is the challenge of shielding community radio from politicians and religious extremists, who will want to hijack it's service for selfish motives, this must be discouraged by a clear regulatory frame work and policy to enable community radio serve social, economic and development purposes.

Another major challenge of community radio is the refusal or delay in approval and release of licenses for community radio broadcast by the Government. This discourages individuals who are ready to set – up community radio for implementing their desired goals thereby short- changing communities from benefiting from such laudable projects.

Conclusion

Community radio has the potential to give a voice to the community it serves with programmes in local languages, respecting local culture, traditions and interest facilitating dialogue within the community. Agricultural agencies, nongovernmental organizations and development professionals can take advantage of the huge opportunity that community radio provides to disseminate usable farm information that can help boost food security efforts in the country.

Recommendations

- Nigerians, especially community/opinion leaders, community radio activists and development agencies must be encouraged to set – up community radio stations in their localities as a proven tool for social change to help provide proper awareness to their communities on development issues.
- Government should remove bureaucratic bottlenecks that causes delay to approval and release of licenses to individuals who are willing to set – up community radio stations if they meet such criteria.

- Tertiary institutions like the Universities, Polytechnics, Monotechnics are encouraged to set – up campus radio stations and run agricultural programmes to enlighten students on the benefits of agriculture, this will help stimulate interest in farming and also serve as a strategy for combating hunger.

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