

## INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT REPORTING IN NIGERIA: A REPORTING APPROACH THAT HAS COME TO STAY



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### **Abstract**

*This paper theoretically discusses rural reporting in Nigeria. It primarily focuses on the under reporting of the rural area by the Nigerian mass media and the strategies that could be employed to adequately cover and report the conditions of the rural dwellers who are underprivileged when it comes to media coverage of development in the country. The mass media in Nigeria have for a long time now ignored reportage of the poor living conditions of the rural people and the slow pace of development or lack of development in the rural area and its consequences on the rural people and the nation at large. Rather, Journalists in Nigeria direct their reportage to the urban areas and cities where news makers and big advertisers that patronise them reside. The study was aimed at providing a guide as well as suggesting strategies that could be employed by journalists to effectively report developments in rural areas. Data for the study was collected from primary sources and critically argued in order to provide balanced evidence from literature on the trend of rural development reporting in Nigeria.*

### **Introduction**

Nigeria, like many other developing countries of Africa, is still experiencing underdevelopment in many sectors of the economy. This has resulted in several economic consequences such as unemployment, poor standard of living, and drive for economic sabotage, shortage of basic social needs such as water, electricity as well as poor healthcare services especially in the rural areas. Most development projects are concentrated in the urban areas to the neglect of the rural communities. Investments in physical, social and economic infrastructures have been focused largely on the cities. As a result, the rural population has extremely limited access to services such as schools and health centres, while the highest number of the populace lacks access to safe drinking water.

In the Nigerian context, the rural areas are associated with poverty and, as such, not attractive to live. The disparity in the development between the rural and the

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urban areas remains the cause of population drift to urban areas in the Less Developed Countries (LDCs). Developmental dichotomy of this dimension raises important challenges bordering on social security and spatial equity. This overconcentration of development in the urban centres has been the greatest disincentive toward sustainable development at the grassroots. This background has been the rationale for rural development basically aimed at promoting standards of living and as a pre-condition for minimising high incidence of rural poverty. (Akpan, 2012).

The situation demands the attention of the media as the watchdog of the society. However, in rural reporting, the Nigerian mass media pay more attention to development in the urban areas from where advertisements and stories from news makers come from. Adequate coverage of rural development and the need for it have been underplayed by the various traditional media – newspaper, radio and television and African communication system. The social media which interplay with the traditional media to provide communication for development or development communication are not easily accessible to many people in the rural areas.

Communication has been identified as a vital means of development and the level of development in a given society depends on its effective application and delivery. (Beemene, 2015). While it is well known that many African countries, Nigeria inclusive are aware of the possible role mass media can play in the transformation of their rural communities, the strategies for the use of communication in rural development and integration in Africa have until recently been approached from a disorganised perspective. (Beemene, 2015). Lack of a well designed strategy for the use of the mass media to effect the desired changes in the rural areas has obscured efforts at effective rural communication and economic transformation. However, mass communication scholars have argued that Journalists remain the bulwark and greatest agents of advancing grassroots development through an institutional and interventionist approach (Beemene, 2015). The rural area as the centre of grassroots requires the use of mass media to mobilise the rural population for grassroots development.

Rural areas are not an island – What happens in rural areas can have a wider impact nationally and internationally on issues such as food security, environmental protection, economic growth, youth employment and women's empowerment. Additionally, improved communications are helping rural areas connect with the rest of the world, establish partnerships and contribute to some major economic, social and political trends. (Luca, Longhi, Breton and Victoria, 2014). The importance of reporting rural areas can therefore, not be underestimated.

It is against this backdrop that we consider it necessary to revisit rural development reporting with a view to providing journalists with further strategies for reporting the state of development in rural areas of Nigeria.

## **Methodology**

This study used documentary based approach of secondary data collection from journals, books and newspapers. The search strategy for secondary data online was exhaustive. A critical literature review method was adopted.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The living conditions of the rural dwellers in Nigeria leave much to be desired when compared to life in the urban areas and cities. This poor condition of living seems to be ignored by the press as they do not report what is happening to development in the rural areas. This neglect by the media is partly the reason why the government does not provide social amenities that make life worth living in the rural area. The condition does not seem to be anything that could improve soon unless the media draws the attention of the government to the rural areas and bring the plights of the people to view. This requires specialized skills and strategies on the part of the journalists.

Unfortunately, most of the researches conducted on rural development focused on the level of the underdevelopment in the rural areas as well as the bias of the media against the rural areas, leaving a lacuna in the area of the skills and strategies journalists require to effectively report developments in the rural areas. It is this gap in knowledge that this study attempts to fill.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The study is anchored on development media theory. The call for media intervention in development process is hinged on what Denis McQuail called "development media theory". This theory considers the media to have great influence on development because it sees the media as a pivot for national development in developing countries. McQuail (1983, p. 131) stated that the central thesis of the theory is that the mass media in developing nations should be used for "the primacy of the national development task (economic, social, cultural and political); the pursuit of cultural and informational autonomy; support for democracy; and solidarity with other developing countries." He outlined six main principles of the theory: Media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy, the media should be open to restriction according to economic priorities and development needs of society, media should give priority in their content to the national culture and language, media should give priority in news and information to links with other developing countries, which are close geographically, culturally and politically. Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedom in their information gathering and dissemination tasks. In the interest of development ends, the State has a right to intervene in, or restrict media operations and devices of censorship, subsidy and direct control can be justified (McQuail. 1983).

McQuail (1983) is of the view that since the Siebert, *et al* (1956) ‘four theories of the press’ (Authoritarian, Libertarian, Soviet/Communist and Social Responsibility) are inadequate in explaining the media systems of developing nations, the need for another theory becomes essential. Thus, he propounded the development media theory to take care of how the media can aid the development of those nations. The assumption is that the mass media are part of the instruments for achieving development in developing nations. McQuail (1987 as cited in Baran and Davis, 2000, p. 112), assert that “Development media theory advocates media support for an existing political regime and its efforts to bring about national economic development....By supporting government development efforts, media aid society at large. This theory argues that until a nation is well established and its economic development well underway, media must be supportive rather than critical of government. Journalists must not pick apart government efforts to promote development but, rather, assist government in implementing such policies.

Because the tenets of the theory advocate cooperation rather than adversarial relationship between the media and the government, development media theory has been abused by the authoritarian regimes who assume media should be subjected to their whims in the name of development. (Kadijat, Yinusa, Addullateef, and Abdul-Rasheed, 2015). Communication research has shown that the media are capable of promoting national development but this does not mean that the media should become a puppet in the hands of government. In the developed world, the media are given a pivotal role in the development and sustenance of their countries. However, the opposite seems to be the case in the developing world in which there is still visible poverty everywhere. (Kadijat, Yinusa, Addullateef, and Abdul-Rasheed, 2015). This theory is considered important for the study because of provision of its tenets that the media should support the government in her development efforts to bring about national development.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

#### **Rural Area in the Nigeria Context**

A rural area according to Daramola (2014) in the context of Africa can be likened to a settlement or village without basic amenities such as electricity, feeder road, modern health institutions and modern market. There are barely well-resourced health centres, clinics, maternal homes and hospitals (Raji, Raji and Musa, 2017), in the rural areas of Nigeria. Where there exists facilities like hospitals, electricity and water, the services provided by such hospitals and the irregularity of power and drinkable water supply leave much to be desired. Okoli and Onah (2002) noted in the same way that medical institution of any type are barely present in most Nigerian rural areas. Where this institution exists, people will have to journey lengthy distances to access them, and that there is clearly inadequate supply of clean water in

the Nigerian rural areas. This results in the circulation of diseases that are water-borne and worsened by poor sanitation (Ele, 2006).

In a general sense, a rural area or countryside is a geographical area that is located outside towns and cities. Typical rural areas have a low [population density](#) and small settlements. [Agricultural](#) areas are commonly rural, as are other types of areas such as [forest](#). The fact is that the definition of rural area varies from country to country, but whatever is not considered as urban area can be classified as belonging to rural area. The variations in the definition are usually for statistical and administrative purposes.

Functionally, a rural area is a geographical area characterised by primary activities such as extraction, farming and gathering among others. Daramola (2014) noted that the inhabitants of rural areas in Nigeria are mostly farmers, fishermen, craftsmen, blacksmith and traditional healers. It is usually headed by traditional chiefs. Harmonising all these definitions, especially as concerned this study, rural Nigeria is measured by two indices: a spatial index, indicating the percentage of the population living in rural areas, and by occupational index which shows the percentage of the labour force in agricultural occupation. It therefore connotes a spatial entity with low population density and whose activities are majorly of primary activities such as agriculture, extraction and gathering among others. It is estimated that agricultural activity occupies four-fifths of the rural population of Nigeria. (Mayowa, 2016).

Nyagba (2009) made it known that the most crucial sector of the Nigerian residents is the rural communities due to the fact that they form a principal source of capital for the country and they also form a major source of raw materials for industrial processes. This was also supported by Abah (2010) who noted that rural people have always been known to source their income from in economic activities like agriculture which constitutes the bedrock of Nigeria's economic development.

In summary, Ijere (1992 as cited in Raji, Raji and Musa, 2017) stated that it is disheartening that the rural sector of Nigeria which accounts for about 95% of the country's food supply has been persistently associated with poverty alongside other features of underdevelopment like poor living standard. This is a result of lack of or inadequate basic amenities like drinkable water, good roads, functional educational facilities, electricity, basic health care facilities, essential agricultural services such as storage facilities, irrigation as well as other farm needs like industrial centres for development of rural industrialisation, skills acquisition centres for manpower and skills improvement, fertilizer for improved agricultural activities, improved market, commerce to boost activities in rural economy and the incomes that come along.

### **Rural Development**

There is no agreement as to the definition of rural development and this constitutes its initial problems (Anaeto, n.d). Different schools of thought had given different definitions to rural development. Diejomah (1973) defined it as a process of

increasing the level of living of rural population, measured by food and nutrition level, health, education, housing, recreation and security. Adegboye (1973) defined it as the development of the rural people in such a continuous manner as to enable them to most effectively and efficiently utilise their intellect, technology and other resources for further development of both themselves and their resources. Uwakah, (1985) sees it as a change process which involves moving the rural people from what is to what ought to be. From the definitions above, it is clear that the object of rural development is the rural people who Olatunbosun (1973) called Nigeria's neglected majority and Anthoni (1981) called them the stagnant sector in the Nigerian economy while Ijere (1981) called them the other Nigeria with poverty linked characteristics.

Rural development is a concerted effort to increase production, create and spread unemployment as well as a rooting out of fundamental causes of poverty, ignorance, hunger, and diseases (Ekokobe, 2014). It is aimed at awakening in the people the urge to develop their own potentials for progress in order to achieve sustainable development. Ekokobe (2014) notes that the lack of understanding of the actual meaning of the concept of rural development has led to the proliferations of approaches, strategies and principles aimed at achieving rural development especially among developing countries. Several rural development programmes especially in agricultural sector have been initiated and implemented in Nigeria. However, many of these projects never lasted to produce sustainable development effects. For instance, the rural development policy so far in Nigeria, which is also expected to have a trickle-down effect on States as well as local governments, has high agricultural development contents. In this case, Nigeria has Ricer Basin Development Authorities and development agencies all over the country. In fact, in developing countries, rural development is synonymous with agricultural development (Ekokobe, 2014). But this is a narrow sense of what rural development entails. The scope of the concept of rural or community development is very wide. It is a multi-dimensional process involving such areas as agriculture, health, education, provision of rural infrastructures, social life, political and economic issues, commerce and industry, among others, and their integration with the national economy (Egbe 2014).

Since the scope of the concept is wide it is the pivot on which a sound national development in all its ramifications can effectively be achieved. (Egbe, 2014). It is therefore, important to think about rural development in an integrated sense, i.e. is a way that the term will assume its full meaning which must include agriculture, educations, health, to mention but a few. Thus, according to the United Nations (1976), the concept of integrated rural development implies that it is a composite or comprehensive programme for rural development in which all relevant sectors such as agriculture, education, housing, health and employment are conceived as interlinking elements in a system having horizontal as well as vertical linkage in operational and spatial terms (Egbe, 2014).

According to Aziz, (1999), the concept of rural development should be viewed as a holistic concept, which recognises the complexity and inter-relatedness of the

many variables which influence the quality of life in rural areas. It is a complex process, which involves the interaction of economic, social, political, cultural, technological and other situational factors. Hence for the actualisation of the concept, these factors have to be integrated with local government policies and plans with the objectives of improving the quality of life of the people in the rural sector. (Egbe, 2014).

Ogidefa (2010) perceived rural development to involve creating and widening opportunities for (rural) individuals to realise full potential through education and sharing in decision and action which affect their lives. The author also viewed it as efforts to increase rural output and create employment opportunities while eliminating fundamental (or extreme) cases of poverty, diseases and ignorance. Therefore, combining all the essential elements of development, rural development can be described as the integrated approach to food production as well as physical, social and institutional infrastructural provisions with an ultimate goal of bringing about both quantitative and qualitative changes which result in improved living standard of the rural population (Egbe, 2014). It is argued that agricultural productivity is not synonymous with rural development but constitutes a very crucial aspect in achieving it since it is the main stay of the economy and that most of the people in rural areas across the country are engaged on land (Egbe, 2014).

In developing countries, such as Nigeria, rural development encompasses all efforts targeted at improving the fortunes of the rural dwellers. They include agricultural set-up projects, rural water supply projects, rural electrification projects, rural health and disease control projects, rural education, rural feeder-road and maintenance projects, Adult education campaign, rural telecommunication system, and rural industrialisation. (Egbe, 2014). Therefore, rural development is a multi-dimensional process through which the productivity, income and welfare, relating to health, nutrition, education, transportation, employment and other features of better living conditions of rural people can be improved upon or transformed. (Mayowa, 2016). According to Igbokwe and Ajala (1995), the earliest attempt at rural development during the colonial era took the form of community development, and later agricultural extension.

The community development approach emphasised self-help to improve health, nutrition and community welfare, whereas the agricultural extension approach was concerned with improving the agricultural productivity. The goal of both programmes ultimately was to produce primary products for the feeding of European industries. This era was also characterised by the development of transport networks in form of railway system not for the benefit of the rural people, but primarily for the benefit of the European business. (Mayowa, 2016). This view is in tandem with the view of others who believe that rural development means a kind of social change imposed on the rural dwellers by people from outside such as public agencies, government and policy makers based outside the region (Judith, et al, 1981). These agencies are sometimes national acting alone and consulting the rural dwellers only

for the space or land to implement their already conceived projects. According to this school of thought, rural development is simply impossible without intervention of the government and international bodies acting in association with government. In their opinion, development is an activity of government and not of peasants, and rural development in particular is not undertaken for peasants, and definitely not by them. (Egbe, 2014). This view is still obtainable in Nigeria but in a modified form where an appeal is made to the communities that projects are to be implemented to pay a counterpart fund for them to be given financial support by the government or international development organisations for a project already conceived by the government to be implemented in their localities. Sometimes, however, the people are given the opportunity to choose the project they need.

The early years of Nigeria's independence also witnessed colossal concentration of development efforts on the modern sector of the economy, however, to the exclusion of investment in the rural economic base. The problems emanating from the total neglect of rural areas and consequential pressures on the urban economy thus generated a serious concern for the government at various levels. Therefore, the problem has been how to develop rural areas both in terms of economic and human resources. Towards this end, a number of development approaches have been pursued by the various governments in Nigeria. These consist mainly in the establishment of projects, programmes, and capacity building institutions. Regrettably, while some of these programmes and projects relatively succeeded, many of them were stillborn and unable to achieve the expected goals for which they were designed (Mayowa, 2016). This failure results from a number of administrative inefficiencies such as corruption, lack of comprehensive rural planning, misplacement of priorities, lack of citizen participation at both the initiation and implementation stages of the programmes among others. The solutions so far advanced have remained practically elusive, unserviceable and unrealistic. This situation has therefore posed serious challenges to the development strategies in Nigeria. Hence, the conditions of the rural communities, in recent years, have not improved beyond peasantry even as more and more rural development programmes and strategies have been unfolded. (Mayowa, 2016).

Furthermore, according to Mabogunje, (1981), rural development is concerned with the self-sustaining improvement of rural areas and implies a broad based re-organisation and mobilisation of the rural masses so as to enhance their capacity to cope effectively with the daily task of their lives and with the changes consequent upon this. In the opinion of Gana, (1996), rural development is important not only for its impact on rural places and people but also for its contribution to the overall development of the nation. In the Nigerian experience where the bulk of the people and land are rural, and where the level of rural output is very low, rural mobilisation provides the quickest and most direct route to national development. This would require the adoption of appropriate technology for raising rural productivity and efficient utilisation of resources, creation of efficient transport network for rural and

urban areas to ensure easy transportation of agricultural produce for massive food production and supply of industrial raw materials (Egbe, 2014).

It is to be observed that the ambit of rural development is very wide indeed, and it requires a comprehensive approach. It includes generation of new employment, more equitable access to arable land, equitable distribution of income, widespread improvement in health, nutrition and housing, creation of incentives and opportunities. It also involves the ability of the local government to create wider opportunities for individuals to realise their full potentials through education and sharing in the decisions and actions which affect their lives.

In reporting rural development, the general thing to bear in mind is that rural development strategy is a functional and effective dynamic mechanism carefully planned to provide a better standard of living for the rural dwellers economically, social and politically, (Hoggart, 1990). This presupposes that rural journalism must be functional and be based on development media theory to provide the people with development news that will sensitise and mobilise the rural population to place priority on community development.

### **Rural News Reporting**

"In order to ensure the daily issues faced by rural poor people and their communities are acknowledged, it is important that their stories are heard and their voices are amplified." (Anon, 2015, p.1). A worrying trend, however, is that media coverage is restricted to urban areas with little or no coverage of rural areas and their issues (Yarde, Luca, Longhi, Breton and Victoria, 2014). This has the effect of leaving people in the rural areas out of the development matrix as their issues get no or limited attention by relevant stakeholders. (Yarde, Luca, Longhi, Breton and Victoria, 2014). The only way to make the stories of the rural dwellers heard is for journalists to report events and development in the rural areas on the media. Rural news reporting is seen here as a specialised type of reporting that requires specialised treatments and specialised skills (Nwosu, 1988). But the fact that it shares many other areas of commonness with other types of news reporting and writing should not be lost sight of. (Nwosu, 1988). Rural news reporting involves mainly reporting and writing news with a rural focus or emphases. Rural news is news written and reported from rural perspective; it is news and other related materials gathered and packaged mainly in the rural areas as opposed to the so-called rural news written for ruralites in urban areas, by urban dwellers and with urban biases. (Nwosu, 1988). Rural news is news that informs, educates urbanites or urban elites and governments about the needs, aspirations, problems, successes, joys, values and general life of the rural dwellers, and informs and educates rural dwellers about government policies, activities, programmes, philosophies, materials, ideas and such other factors they might need for survival, progress or improved living standards. (Nwosu, 1988). In addition rural news reporting supply information to the relevant authorities and

communicates components of the much publicized and recommended approach to develop the rural set-up.

Rural reporting provide the news and other related material that constitute the vital information and communication component of the much-publicized and recommended integrated approach to rural development, which is defined as a consciously-formulated, planned, and executed systematic and multi-sectoral programme, aimed at integrating the marginalised people of the rural areas into the mainstream of better living, as opposed to mere existence or subsistence (Nwosu, 1987).

### **Overview of Rural News Reporting in Nigeria**

Despite the claims of journalist to adherence to the principles of objectivity and commitment to fairness, it can be argued that the Nigerian mass media have over the years, solely neglected the rural areas (Kings, 2018). The perspective of the Nigeria mass media was, and continues to be (despite some progress), strictly urban. According to Nwanko and Ochen, (2012) the Nigerian media have often ignored the rural areas by reporting on what is taking place in the urban areas. When the journalists write about the rural communities they do so from the urban perspective. That is, the media reports and writes from the standpoint of an urban dweller's world. The ills of the rural areas, difficulties of life there, their burning sense of grievance, are seldom seriously conveyed (Kings, 2018). This is a big gap in communication for development when it is realised that most of the citizens of Nigeria inhabit the rural areas and that rural areas remains fundamental in the governance of any country. Over ninety-five percent (95%) of the Nigerian mass media, particularly the print media, can be referred to as the urban press-après that repeatedly and unconsciously, reflects the bias, the paternalism and the indifference of the typical urban dweller. (Kings, 2018).

The hardships faced by people in rural areas are rarely reported in the media. Chester and Neelameghan, (2000) observed that most people in African countries reside in the rural areas where their needs are not adequately met. They have not been given an opportunity to partake in developmental projects where they are supposed to benefit from. In a country like Nigeria, where a host of development issues need to be addressed, the media can highlight the problems and the challenges faced by the people working at the grass root level; use its power to influence people in a manner which would lead to social welfare and make contribution towards the uplift of the poor and the rural people (Murthy, 2015).

Statistics indicate that more than 80 per cent of African settlements are mostly in remote and pristine conditions. (Kings, 2018). Little or no changes have taken place in the living standard of the rural dwellers in Nigeria. Yet news reporting on the average appears to be centred on the urban and metropolitan cities which are mostly populated by the elitist and privileged class. Most rural dwellers live in bare subsistence and as such suffer virtual isolation in terms of basic news coverage

(Kings, 2018). This situation is often ignored by rural reporters who go for bizarre stories. In support of this view, Jeffrey Shrank, a mass communication scholar stated that the "educated guesses of news managers" and their palpable indifference towards practical engagement and understanding of the intrigues of grassroots reporting make reporters tend to compromise their role as dispassionate leaders of public opinion and custodians of the conscience of society. (Kings, 2018).

Pundits also observe that the lack of effective communication mechanism at the grassroots has been a calculated strategy by the elitist class to undermine the potentialities and practical engagement of rural dwellers in the process of development. This could be because "Strident use and application of effective information process and feedback mechanism would liberate the rural populace from ignorance and get them off the hook of perpetual servitude and stunted economic growth that are exploited by power holders to make the rural population dance to their tunes in the time of elections". (Kings, 2018). Critics are of the view that "rural dwellers draw the attention of the elitist class and the wielders of power only during period of political transition and mandate renewal, when the rural dwellers are tossed with pretentious orgies, noble sentiments and patriotic phrases, and unfulfilled promises". (Kings, 2018).

Mass communication scholars have, however, argued that Journalists remain the bulwark and greatest agents of advancing grassroots development through an institutional and interventionist approach. Golding (1977) believes that the gap in communication and feedback mechanism between the grassroots and the urban centres, can be filled by "the dispassionate intervention of journalists to constantly remind the wielders of power of the promises of their mandate, their social responsibility towards the society and stewardship of management of public funds, as well as commending government's effort when such obligations are fulfilled". This mediating role of the media is believed to be platform of fostering a fledging relationship between the government and the grassroots.

Analysts have attributed the indifference of news reporters towards rural reporting to the privileges and advantages offered by urbanization and city administration. Golding (1977), for instance, states that journalistic apathy towards practical engagement on exploration of development potentials in the rural areas undermines the moral and professional obligation of journalists as society's watch dog". This bias manifests itself in one or two forms: neglect of the majority and distortion of news about the rural populace. While the former refers to neglect of rural efforts, aspirations and overall existence, the latter refers to a situation whereby the issues, events or efforts of our rural areas, whenever reported, are inaccurately and sometimes carelessly reported in the media (Kings, 2018). In most cases, this inaccuracy or distortion stems from the typical Nigerian journalist's misguided belief that since majority of our rural populace are illiterate, all of them cannot understand whatever was being said. (Kings, 2018).

Also, the kind of information that the rural people are exposed to through the media is very much system oriented in such a way that they fail to interpret the media messages, as a result they do not understand or benefit from media messages (Kamba, 2009). The rural people live in information deserted areas yet information on government policies such as should reach them.

In the practice of rural journalism, there are obvious challenges that reporters are bound to face in covering the rural areas. One of such major challenges is the absence of basic amenities such as electricity and other elixir for civilised living. Also, there seems to be a confusion amongst journalists on who they owe loyalty between the urban population that patronise and advertise in the media and the rural population that are seen as incapable of consuming media contents especially the print media since majority of the population are illiterate and also poor, and therefore do nothing to support the growth of the media. This confused state in which most journalists in the developing countries find is problematic.

Arguably, most media houses in the country today believe that since they are situated in the urban areas, their primary task is to satisfy their urban colleagues, who, after all, are mostly those who attend to the media and, of course advertise in the papers and magazines or buy up available air time to slot in their commercials. (Kamba, 2009). Perhaps they are right to adopt this stance of concentrating on the urban areas, even if the journalists are ‘socialists’ at heart. To a certain extent, such an argument is valid. However, it negates the role of journalists in the holistic national development of a nation and portrays journalists as partial umpires

### **Strategies for Rural Reporting**

According to Daramola (2014, p.29), “Rural journalists should not spare the details in writing a rural community story. The opening paragraph is particularly important in writing about rural news. Rural stories frequently deal with events which are less immediate and evolve over time; they often require more background than usual, and readers need to be fully aware of the context. This allows more leeway in the into than a straightforward story about a fire or rubbery, but does not excuse the writer from the basic rules of journalism: tell the readers something they don’t already know, and make them want to learn more.”

The way to achieve this to establish a tie between the reader and the subject of the story (Daramola, 2014). Rural stories are usually human stories that deal with events that affect real people in their daily lives. Daramola advised that a rural reporter should look for this connection and spell it out in the story. A journalist should ask people questions, and not limit himself or herself to statement by the usual spokesman and authorities. He should find out how events will affect ordinary people, and ask those people how they react. (Daramola, 2014).

Nwosu (1988) pointed out that many strategies have been applied and are still being applied in many places for reporting the rural areas. The contemporary rural reporter should be familiar enough with these strategies to be able to advice on them

and utilise the best possible ones. First, there is what can be aptly described as the "touch-and-go" approach to rural reporting which is similar to what Bernard Cohen called "the bushfire reporting syndrome". (Nwosu, 1988). This kind of rural reporting comes in forms that include rushing to cover a rural area only when a major calamity has befallen that community or a major event like a highly entertaining festival is taking place. Daramola (2014) simply described this type of reporting as a more or less an emergency visit to report rural areas in city-based newspaper, radio and television (Daramola, 2014). It is the type of reporting where a city-based reporter is sent to the village to cover an official event, or to report, in most cases, a disaster or a funeral of an important personality. It also includes giving a particular rural community intensive coverage for a short period in order to highlight its problems, people and issues, and then moving off to another rural community. (Nwosu, 1988). These kinds of "touch-and-go" journalism do not make for effective, balanced and sustained coverage of the rural areas and are not in line with the philosophy of rural reporting. They are therefore, not effective and should be discouraged.

There is also the second major approach of depending solely on government information offices to report and write news about the rural areas for the mass media and the government which is still used in many areas. The inadequacy of this approach is obvious. For one thing, government information officers posted to rural areas are usually not many or enough to effectively cover the rural areas. (Nwosu, 1988). They are also generally ill-equipped and sometimes insufficiently trained and motivated to do good jobs. Injection of excessive government biases or perspectives into their stories can sometimes also reduce the potency of what would have been good rural news reports and analyses. It is advisable not just depend on government information officers and their outputs or releases, even though what they write can be used to supplement or expand the scope of our own media reportorial efforts. (Nwosu, 1988).

Related to the above is a third approach which involves depending on rural agricultural, health and other change agents for the procurement of rural news reports. The problem with this approach is that these groups of change agents are not trained Journalists, even though they may have taken crash-courses on communication. (Nwosu, 1988). We should not therefore expect them to properly gather, write or package rural news stories in manners that will satisfy the- aims and objectives of rural news reporting. At best, we should use these change agents and their products as useful additional sources of information for rural news reporting. Some media organisations also depend entirely on news agencies' reports for their rural reports. (Nwosu, 1988). This might be alright if the news agencies concerned are so well-staffed and well-equipped that they can assure effective and sustained coverage of all rural communities and all sector of rural life that include agriculture, health, cultural activities like festivals, rites, rituals, fetishes and their significances or contributions to development. But the best approach to effective coverage of the rural areas seems to be the establishment and sustenance of a well-trained, well-oriented

and well-equipped rural press corps by every media organisation on a permanent basis. This approach requires that the reporter should live in the village or rural area and report the rural area to the rural people. Daramola (2014) states that this kind of reporting is undertaken by the village journalist who report the village to the city; a few city newspapers have reporters especially freelancers based in the rural areas. This type of reporting is considered the most appropriate because the reporter lives within the village, interacts with the villagers and understands the lifestyle orientations, problem and aspirations of the villagers (Daramola, 2014). Sometimes, the reporter works hand-in-hand with development agents and both of them engage in dialogue with the rural folks at village squares, meetings or palace to discuss the content of newspaper. (Daramola, 2014).

Effective rural news reporting requires that the reporters live with and understand the rural people and the rural environments, interactions, events, problems, and issues they will be reporting and writing about. This will be relatively more expensive than the other approaches, but its pay-off. We have to adopt and encourage it if we are serious about using rural reporting to promote rural development in Africa (Nwosu, 1988).

The writing style and the skills required for rural reporting are not different from the general journalistic style of news writing and reporting. However, it is important for rural reporters to write their stories mostly from human angles rural report because most of the time rural news events and issues have to do with rural people and their environments. (Nwosu, 1988). Good journalism is about people, and those living in rural communities are as diverse as in any urban setting. Rather than simply focusing on the problems they face, many are finding solutions. Include their voices to add extra dimensions to your stories. (Luca, Longhi, Breton and Victoria, 2014). Even when rural news is directly related to things, rather than people, it should still be written as much as possible from a human angle that will bring out how that thing or object relates to people. Rural news audiences are more likely to expose themselves to such stories and relate more to them and such stories tend to be more persuasive or effective.

It is assumed that a rural reporter is a trained journalist with the rudiment of news packaging and reporting skills. Hence, he or she should be able to apply different models of reporting and a variety of writing approaches to satisfactorily explain the rural world to his audiences. He also needs varieties of approaches not only to reach his diverse audiences, but also to lend sufficient appeal to the multi-faceted stories of rural, human and national development that he will be reporting to his rural and urban audiences on a regular basis. The alternative models available to a rural reporter include the inverted pyramid format, the chronological order and the triangle model of news presentation. In the chronological order of news writing the events and facts of the story are presented sequentially or logically in their order of occurrence than their order of importance. This model of news writing enjoys the advantage of resembling the African tradition or format of story-telling popular in

rural areas. The triangular model is the direct opposite of the inverted pyramid style with the climax or most important part of the story being written in the last paragraph. (Nwosu, 1988). The triangular model appeals to rural readers and listeners because it is in line with the traditional style of storytelling in Africa original to rural setting.

There is also the Screw Model of news writing which will be very useful for presenting rural news stories. It rejects the inverted-pyramid model idea that the facts or points of every news story should be presented first, and does not see this as always possible in practice. The Screw Model adopts the top portion of the inverted-pyramid model, but then levels off the other points of the story, thus making room for points or information that are of equal weight. It also makes room for the inclusion of minor details that are clearly identifiable as minor details. These details appear at the tail or sharp point of the screw that stands for the last paragraphs of the story.

We also have the literary news writing form as another alternative model of news presentation that the rural reporter should utilise from time to time. It has been described as the "objective re-creation of experience realised through subjective means." It combines the techniques of depth reporting and literary writing in trying to paint a picture of reality in a news report. It uses such literary techniques as narration, scene, drama summary, process, point of view, idioms, proverbs, rhythm, irony and other figures of speech, extended dialogue and imagery to make a rural news story alive and appealing to its audiences who can easily relate to it (Nwosu, 1988).

We should not be discouraged by what may seem to be the dearth of stories in the rural areas. Most reporters believe that rural areas are not news worthy and gloss over the rural populace and concentrate their news report on the already thriving urban centres. Once you turn the spotlight on rural, you will find there is a lot of information out there to sift through. The rural areas provide countless opportunities for news coverage. Rural areas are noted for a fledging sense of native heritage and cultural values that could be tapped into news. (Kings, 2018). Finding a strong angle that is newsy and fresh, which makes a good read, is essential if you want to grab the attention of your readers, viewers and listeners (Yarde, de Luca, Longhi, Breton and Victoria, 2014). Rural people are drivers of change and innovation and can be good sources of information – People are not merely passive recipients of external aid: they can be successful, valuable entrepreneurs. (Luca, Longhi, Breton and Victoria, 2014). Today, rural is “news”: rural areas host innovative projects that can generate good media stories –It is time for media to focus on rural contexts and to weave rural angles into mainstream topics such as the economy, employment, environment, technology, communication, politics, human rights, business, health, gender issues and ethnic groups. (Luca, Longhi, Breton and Victoria, 2014).

Using the human interest approach to news reporting, the arts, economy, culture and conditions of living of the rural people can be weaved into prominence in news reporting, with the objective of giving the rural people a sense of belonging. What rural reporters need to effectively comb the rural populace for news is

empathy. (Kings, 2018). Rural reporters must have a conscientious appeal by feeling the pulse of the rural dwellers to write about them. Their living conditions notwithstanding, rural dwellers deserve to be adequately informed and mobilised because they constitute the bulk of the country's population, and they need accurate and reliable information to function effectively in our fast growing and technology-driven society. Reporters must engage in practical and thorough investigation of the rural areas and rouse their sensitivity towards issues affecting their wellbeing.

Since the rural reporter may be of an entirely dissimilar background and orientation from the rural areas he is covering, there is need for in-depth research that will help him know the information needs of the people. A rural reporter, who does not indulge in dogged research and familiarisation with the development needs of the rural people, will only become an agent of misinformation and disinformation (Kings, 2018). Such incautious and unguarded reporters end up compounding the development problems of the people and sometimes incite crisis.

Information source is therefore, important to the rural reporter. The most reliable sources of rural information include; agricultural extension workers, rural farmers, rural health workers, libraries, community leaders, traditional and religious leaders and government departments. To avoid reporting half-baked truth, the rural reporter must seek in-depth investigation of any rural development story.

Rural reporting therefore requires active involvement and sacrifice on the part of the reporter beyond the conventional news approach. The reporter must seek to break new ground and bring to the fore interesting and challenging aspect of the people's lives. Rural reporters must comment on issues of economic interest to the people, such as health, agriculture, education, culture, commerce, transportation, festival, religion, among others. Perhaps, rural reporters are best disposed and at the forefront of mobilizing the rural communities towards achieving the imperatives of national cohesion. (Kings, 2018).

### **Conclusion**

The role that journalists play in the development of a society cannot be over emphasised. In the area of rural and urban development, however, journalists in Nigeria and other African countries tend to focus their coverage on the urban areas to the neglect of the rural communities. Rural areas are characterised by poverty and underdevelopment and therefore, offer no attraction to the journalist that function in media houses located in urban areas and cities. Nigerian journalists tend to rarely appreciate the richness and validity of rural people's knowledge or the hidden nature of rural poverty. Little or no coverage is given to the rural communities by reporters in Nigeria because they perceive rural areas as not economically viable to provide advertisement support to their media houses. As the Fourth Estate of the realm, journalists must be willing to perceive newsworthy events with due consideration to their environments and development needs of their people. In the discharge of this

responsibility, Nigerian journalists should ensure adequate coverage of rural communities and set agenda for the development of our rural areas.

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