

The Role of Traditional Media in the Propagation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

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Abstract

The sustainable development goals are a new, universal set of goals which United Nations member states are expected to use in framing their agendas and political policies in the next fifteen years. These goals expand and follow the millennium development goals adopted in the year 2001. The SDGs which were adopted in September 2015 have a deadline of 2030. The goals are 17 in number and they go further to examine the root cause of poverty and the universal need for development that works for all people. Some countries recorded tremendous results in the achievement of their MDG goals. Essentially the success of the SDGs will depend largely on the effective communication of the goals through traditional media campaigns. The use of the traditional media especially in the rural areas will go a long way in the propagation of the goals in Nigeria. Information and public awareness tools are indispensable tools in making the public understand the concept and importance of the sustainable development goals. The traditional media is also a platform for giving practical meanings to the sustainable development goals and their relevance to daily life. The traditional media has the power to provide the channel for dialogue and discussions between experts, institutions and the citizens. The traditional media has the added advantage of reaching people at the grassroots in Nigeria. The attainment of the sustainable development goals is dependent on the communication tools used in reaching the people. This paper seeks to examine the role the traditional media will play in the propagation of the goals. Relevant theories were used to frame the topic, existing literature were reviewed and discussions and recommendations on how to engage the traditional media were made.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs, development, communication, traditional media

1. INTRODUCTION

The sustainable development goals are targets which are related to international development. They are a universal set of goals with targets and indicators that will frame the agendas and policies of member states in the next fifteen years. Essentially, the SDGs are the next generation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); they are an expansion of the MDGs. The SDGs were adopted at the United Nations summit in September 2015. They became operational globally in January 2016.

The SDGs cannot be discussed appropriately without adequate reference to the MDGs which represent the first steps by governments to align their policies with programmes aimed at ending poverty and improving the lives of the poor. Although the MDGs were faulted for being narrow and not all encompassing because they did not address the root cause of poverty, gender equality, holistic development, addressing human rights and specific economic development some countries were able to meet their goals. The SDGs were designed to be more inclusive and sustainable so as not to abandon anyone.

The SDG process commenced in 2012 at the United Nations conference on sustainable development held in Rio de Janeiro. At that conference, an open working group was created and given the task of drawing up the goals. In July 2014, the open working group presented a proposal to the United Nations General Assembly. The 17 goals and the 169 targets of the SDGs which cover a wide range of issues are -:

1. No poverty
2. Zero Hunger
3. Good health and well being
4. Quality education
5. Gender equality
6. Clean water and sanitation
7. Affordable and clean energy
8. Decent work and economic growth
9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure
10. Reduced inequalities
11. Sustainable cities and communities
12. Responsible consumption and production
13. Climate action
14. Life below water
15. Life on land

16. Peace and justice, strong institutions
17. Partnership for goals

Source: Centre For Public Policy Alternative brief on the SDGs

The all-inclusive nature of these goals makes it rather difficult to envisage their achievement by some member countries, especially those that could not achieve the MDGs. However, it is believed that with communication through the traditional media the SDGs will be implemented successfully. The successful implementation can be achieved through the effective sensitization and mobilization of the people to create the necessary awareness needed. The implementation of the SDGs will also be based on the capabilities of the countries to do so. This is also based on the reality that the SDGs do not take into consideration the disparity in wealth concentration and inequality among member nations.

Nigeria is a country plagued with developmental challenges and dwindling revenue for the sale of crude oil which is the major money spinner in the economy. If the SDGs are to be met they have to be prioritized. The reasonable approach is to adopt a strategy which will involve a proper analysis of the MDGs to assess the mistakes made in their implementation. Essentially, it is the view of experts that the MDGs were faced with challenges ranging from poor project execution, inflation of contracts, contractual deficiencies, poor data tracking and implementation tracking (CPPA brief on the SDGs). For the SDGs to be achieved these challenges of the MDGs must not be allowed to reoccur. The government spent 3trillion Naira annually as against the 4.3trillion Naira that was earmarked for the achievement of the MDGs. With this in mind, there is obviously going to be a challenge of funding in the achievement of the SDGs.

Globally, the issue of funding seems to be a big challenge, this issue can be addressed by Nigeria through a strategic means of focusing less on donor funding to direct budgetary support. This can also be assisted by private sector financing. The increase in internal revenue taxes will also be of immense assistance to funding the SDGs.

2. TRADITIONAL MEDIA AND THE SDGS

The shift from the MDGs to the SDGs is a transformational process which should be handled with seriousness. Globally, there is the need to address the SDGs with their targets and indicators. Although there have been a number of agreements on sustainable development, the awareness level is still very low as many people do not know about the SDGs and what they are meant for. It will be recalled that the success most countries recorded with the MDGs was attributed not only to the financial commitment made but also the communication strategies which they adopted. In most developing countries like Nigeria, the strength of achieving success with national projects lies in the ability to create awareness of the project. This is why there is a heavy reliance on the traditional media which is often regarded as a grass root medium. The traditional media which is made up of radio, television, and newspapers plays a key role as an institution in the society, these are channels through which the media disseminates information to the society and performs their functions. According to Lasswell (1948) the three functions of the mass media are surveillance of the environment, the correlation of parts of the society in responding to the environment and the transmission of social heritage from generation to generation. In addition to these functions, Wright (1959) added a fourth function of entertainment. It is therefore pertinent to note that these functions of the media are carried out in various ways which can either be through news reporting, editorials, criticisms of activities of government etc.

For the media to be of immense benefit in the realization of the SDGs, they need to have the capacity to be part of the implementation, reporting and monitoring of the goals. To be able to do this, they must be equipped with the relevant skills required to enable them carry out their duties. The key to achieving the SDGs rests on the following drivers, information access by the people, access to justice, capable institutions to push the process, accountability and transparency, peace and security, an informed media and support of the civil society. For the traditional media to function, it must also have the freedom to perform its duties in the society, and the aim of the SDGs which is to foster development in the nations of the world cannot be achieved if there are no changes in behaviour. The media therefore acts as the change agent by ensuring that it involves all the stakeholders in the communication process. Essentially, at that point any communication that emanates from the media is termed communication which will be vital to achieving development. This is why Servaes (2005) argues that there are five types of communication: behaviour change communication, mass Communication, participatory communication, advocacy communication and communication for structural and sustainable social change.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Agenda setting theory

This study of the role of the traditional media in the propagation of the SDGs is supported by the agenda setting theory of McCombs and Shaw (1977) which shows that members of the society tend to follow the agenda set by the dominant media in living their lives. Therefore, the traditional media can set the agenda about the SDGs and they will become a major issue of public discourse. This will create the much needed attention for the SDGs.

Akeem et al (2013) sees the ability of the media to order and organize our world for us as one of the most important effect mass communication has on our society. McComb and Stone (1981) were able to infer from three surveys they carried out that it takes between two to six months for an item to move from a media agenda to a public agenda. This further strengthens the thinking that if the media devotes time in reporting on the SDGs it goes a long way in creating awareness and gathering public support for the SDGs.

3.1.1 Agenda building theory

Lang and Lang (1983) conducted a study on the relationship between the press and public opinion in the Watergate crisis and discovered that the original notion of agenda setting needs to be improved upon and that the agenda setting theory can be expanded to agenda building. This involves a process whereby the media, government and the public influence one another in determining the issues that are seen as important. This theory takes the role of the traditional media in propagating the SDGs further by involving the government and the public's perspective in determining what they project as important. They build on the agenda they have set on the SDGs by having credible individuals speak about the SDGs. To build on the SDG agenda, the traditional media would have to frame the issues and code them with words which would have the greatest impact on the stakeholders.

3.2 Development Communication theory by McQuail deriving from Everrette Roger's Diffusion of Innovation theory and Daniel Lerner's Modernization theory.

This theory sees media and communication as propelling modernization and modern physical and economic development in their environments and societies i.e. among society members. In Nigeria, a large proportion of them are poor and they reside in the sub-urban and rural areas. The innovation and diffusion theory propounded by Everette Rogers in 1986 proposed using communication to transfer technological innovation from development agencies to their client. This raises the appetite for change in them through creating a climate of modernization among members of the public. The traditional media in this case is used to support development programmes by disseminating information that will stimulate participation and support from the public for the SDGs. According to Ronning and Orgeret (2006) the strategies adopted by developing countries differ but broadcasting and the press remain the same because they are used to inform people about projects, their advantages and to build support for the projects. This is the diffusion vs participation method. Although the Mass media especially the traditional media can spread awareness of the SDGs in Nigeria especially, at the grass root level, the adoption of the SDGs, is largely based on interpersonal communication if there is to be any impact on social behaviour. Recent perspectives on this theory claim that there is the limitation of a vertical or one way communication. Research has shown that information from sources such as radio and television have very low effects on behavioural change. The aim of propagating the SDGs is also for social change and national development. According to Servaes (1999) the participatory model is better option because it gives an opportunity for the public to engage the media and make their information needs available to the media.

3.3 Media framing theory

Framing as a concept is closely related to agenda setting but it takes the research further by focusing on the issues at hand. The media framing theory gives attention to certain events and situates them within an area of meaning. In framing, the media tends to draw attention to certain topics. This stems from the way news is presented, and the frame in which the news is presented is mostly a choice that is made by the journalist. Framing is all about the way the media and media gatekeepers arrange and present the news and issues they cover and the way the news is received and interpreted by the audience. According to Bleske (1995) the way news is framed has important effects on the way the information in the news is processed. To be able to play a useful role in the propagation of the SDGs the traditional media must frame the news in a way that the importance of the SDGs can be spotted by the people. This is necessary so as to influence the perception of news on the SDGs by the people. Framing should take into consideration, factors like selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration.

3.4 Media Dependency theory

This theory was propounded by Sandra Ball Rokeach and Melvin Defleur in 1976. In their paper titled 'A dependency theory of media effects' they observed that in a media dominated world which has been worsened by the growth of the new media. Individuals tend to be dependent on the media that fulfils their need. This theory according to Lane is based on the uses and gratification theory and is also linked with agenda setting theory. In this case, individuals especially those at the grassroots will largely depend on traditional media for information on the SDGs, They are exposed to radio which is has a wide reach and is very popular with rural dwellers, they also exposed to television and newspapers but they are not going to depend of new media because they do not have access to them and even where they are available they may not know how to use them. Most of the rural dwellers are not literate.

3.5 Social relations theory

This theory was propounded by Melvin Defleur in 1970. It posits that people's reactions to media messages and how they act on them depends on their relations with significant others who may be friends, relatives or social groups. Essentially with a focus on traditional media, especially radio which is seen as a grass root medium by communication scholars of repute, discussions about the SDGs will take place when the people react and interact about the SDGs. This means that people with a wider network may get may information about the SDGs as they tend to interact more and discuss topical issues. The fastest means of disseminating information to rural dwellers is through the broadcast medium; this is so because of their availability in the rural areas.

4. Literature Review.

In order to assess the state of the media today, it is pertinent to a critical look at the media in the last two decades from the broadcast media deregulation era of 1992. The media since then has been plagued with the good, the bad and the ugly. The positive impacts of the deregulation process are competition, job opportunities, professionalism and specialization. It has also witnessed low productivity and a reduction in the quality of media content produced. The focus is on foreign content to the detriment of our own locally produced content. News which used to be a huge source of information for the people is now downplayed for entertainment. The impact of this on the SDGs is that less communication about the SDGs can be achieved and this will affect their propagation. According to Oso (2012) the Nigerian media have become agents of powerful elites. His argument is based on the notion that media organizations have become dependent on government because they experience economic constraints. Therefore they tend to express the opinions of the social groups that dominate them; this is detrimental to the masses that rely on them for information and protection. Raufu (2003) in his own assessment of the media maintains that for the press to perform its function, it must be independent of the government. This independence gives room for them to give unbiased and objective information to the people. This is in line with making the government responsible and accountable to the people. The dominance of the broadcast media and the press leads to manipulation. Akeem et al (2013) posits that a rich media practice is the only way to help the media play its development role well. Nwuneli (1980) argues that the not involving the larger population in media consultation affects their social economic status. Since the SDGs are geared towards the eradication of poverty and addressing other developmental goals, it is only an informed populace that can strive towards achieving the goals. Nwuneli (2009) is of the opinion that most of these people do not participate in national development and do not have the required exposure to most media information because they are the urban and rural poor. He is of the opinion that these people are not to be blamed for the contents that they are exposed to.

5. National Development

National development is a key aspect of national growth. The process of national development is always people driven and it is all about providing what the masses need to enable them make a living and be comfortable in the society. The SDGs are geared towards achieving national development. This is why the United Nations have dedicated so much in terms of finance and other resources to ensure that they are realized. Oyelaran (1990) argues that development is the continuous enhancement of the wellbeing and security of people in a manner that enables them reach their maximum potentials. This is only achievable through the equal distribution of the nation's resources. This means that the political, social and economic activities of a nation should be focused on achieving these goals. The SDGs if well implemented and monitored will definitely take the nation to glorious heights. However, this cannot be possible without the use of the media in their propagation. Giving priority to information and education by the media is a key role of the media in national development. News has a coercive force because it has the power to bring people together, the media should make use of news belts when propagating the SDGs. According to Agbese (1990) information is power and it is the centre of all human interactions, without information we would not know about the things that happen around us and we will not be equipped to make judgements which will be beneficial to us. Lack of information breeds ignorance. It is therefore disheartening to observe that only a small fraction of our entire population in this county have access to information. How then can we achieve success with national projects if information which is a key strategy to driving national and international projects cannot be made available to people especially those in the rural areas?

There is a grave implication whenever a vast proportion of the population is left out of the information process. There is a setback in development anytime news does get to rural and sub-urban areas and this is often the case. This is why most national development projects do not succeed in those areas. The high illiteracy rates in these areas do not also help matters because even where information is available assimilation is difficult. The nation's media seems to be restricted solely to disseminating information in the cities. There is no proliferation of media organisations in rural area and these areas which could benefit immensely if community media are available. Most of our media outlets have moved on from speaking the language of the people. Sowemino (1996) observes that prior to deregulation of broadcasting in 1992: local language programmes were frequently used. Today, this is no longer the case with the new crop of deregulated radio and television stations which have

initiated a broadcasting trend which does not favour indigenous languages. For example, some radio stations prefer to use broadcasters with foreign accents rather than with the accent most rural dwellers can understand. The use of indigenous languages in the broadcast of messages in promoting the SDGs will definitely contribute to the clarity and effectiveness in information dissemination.

The propagation and achievement of the SDGs is totally dependent on the ability of the traditional media to disseminate communication that is development laden. For this approach to be successful all the stakeholders must work together. The key stakeholders here are government, the rural populace and the media.

6. Discussions

This paper posits that the sustainable development goals will be achieved if the traditional media make information and news its focal point especially among the people in the rural areas. This position is supported Wainwright (1982) claim that journalism is information processed to cater for human curiosity of a world that also wants to be aware of what is happening now. Media reports which are gathered systematically are aimed at informing the people to enable them prepare to act or react to what is happening around them and even in the world. The media, especially traditional media have the power to mobilize people and spur them to action. This can be done through awareness campaigns on radio and television. Other means through which the SDGs could be communicated to rural dwellers could include the use of extant traditional channels of communication also known as 'Oramedia' such as stories, proverbs, folklore, music, age grades, festivals gongs, drums, elders and family heads etc.

Essentially, the key functions of the media are to inform, educate and entertain. These functions have a collective impact on the lives of people and it necessary to take a critical look at these functions.

1. Information-The media plays this role to keep the people abreast of all that happen in the society. It is their responsibility to do this objectively and ethically. The information provided by the media affects all aspects of human life, be it social, political or economic. People to a large extent depend on the media to make important decisions regarding their lives. Although it is often said that the media is a reflection of the society in which it operates, the media is still a very powerful social institution that exerts influence on the society. This influence can help in the propagation and attainment of the SDGs.
2. Education: The media plays the role of an educator. This happens when people depend so much on it and they start cultivating the habits or the ideologies which the media propagates. The fact that the media has the power to change people and societies is observable in the influence of the western media on people's culture. The western media has been able to erode the culture of people in the world through the content it generates. Media content constructs reality and the people must know how to deconstruct media constructions. This is the only way they can truly benefit from the media is the major which can be used to educate people about the objectives and implementation processes of the SDGs.
3. Entertainment- This happens to be most popular and recognized functions of the media. The content is packaged a romance, film, music, cartoons, drama, humour, general interest. People are mostly drawn to this function because it helps them manage or beat stress. These entertainment pieces are drawn from local, national and international themes. The imported contents which people tend to gravitate towards are mostly in English, this does not make easy for non-English rural folks to enjoy them. Yet, they watch their children being largely influenced by these contents. The entertainment dominated media situation affects national development negatively because the media devotes too much time to that function and so little time to functions that can aid national development. Since the media are focused on this particular function, the SDGs can be portrayed in our Nollywood movies which have gained popularity with the people. Similarly, our local musicians could also include the SDGs in their music as their songs are listened to in the nooks and crannies of the country, they could spread the message. We are also have talented comedians who have a lot of following who could be made brand Ambassadors of the SDGs to help in spreading the message.

7. Conclusion

It is clear that the only way to propagate the SDGs is through information, education and entertainment by the media. In this paper the traditional media was identified as the best means of achieving this objective because of its all-inclusive nature. In Nigeria the traditional media serves both urban and rural dwellers. However, it is worthy to note here that, for the media to play its role successfully in helping to propagate and achieve the SDGs it must shift its entertainment focus to information and education. Without this fundamental shift in approach, the traditional media may be catering to only the elites in Nigeria who may not be interested in the SDGs. Since the larger proportion of Nigerians are rural dwellers, selecting effective channels of transmitting information to them in terms of language use, is key. Ekwelie (1980) is of the opinion that the only yardstick for judging the media is through their contribution to national development. This is because they are social institutions which should take on the task of sensitizing and mobilizing the citizenry towards national development. The assertion

that information begets knowledge and knowledge gives power is typical in this case. It is only through teamwork by the stakeholders in this country that the SDGs can be achieved and the media must drive and champion that cause.

8. Recommendations

The usefulness of traditional media to the propagation of the SDGs is definitely an aspect of their implementation which must be taken serious. In order to successfully achieve the objectives of the media. It is pertinent for me to make the following recommendations:-

1. The traditional media should design programmes or content in local languages to create awareness and educate the people on the SDGs and their prospects.
2. Participatory development communication from the media should be encouraged as this gives people a sense of belonging to the project personally. It is also a way of identifying and satisfying the communication needs of the people especially those in the rural areas. For example the media should involve rural dwellers while recording some programmes for promoting the SDGs. They should be given the opportunity talk about their expectations and aspirations.
3. The establishment of community media in the rural areas will go a long way in keeping the people informed of government policies and projects. It will also aid community development. Meaningful development can only take place if people are mobilized. For mobilization to take place there must be free flow of information. Since the primary duty of the press is to inform the public, the public must also strive to be informed. If this is properly done everyone will be aware of the place of the press in the society. People will also be able to contribute their quota to national development,
4. There is a need to strive to attain a balance in media content. There should be 50% information as this will help in the surveillance of the environment 30% for education and correlation of responses and 20% for entertainment in line with Lasswell and Wrights functions. If this is done there will be more enlightenment in the rural areas because they will become exposed to content which will educate them and they will be better informed.
5. For the educational function of the media to have an impact, it advisable to develop materials jingles and short videos about the SDGs in local languages and use them 80% of local, zonal and national broadcasting and publishing. This will assist in the mobilization of the 70% illiterate and semi illiterates to cope with demands of the modern world.
6. The government, media and educational institutions should work together at developing adult literacy programmes with content on the SDGs. By doing this, a larger proportion of people will be involved in the SDG implementation process. In addition being better informed gives them a better chance of taking decisions.

To further strengthen the argument that the role of the traditional media in propagating the SDGs is to provide information, I would like to add that traditional media campaigns often generate high results. It is unfortunate that the airtime or newspaper coverage given to national development campaigns is not adequate. Media houses would rather develop more time to entertainment programmes because they are seen as revenue spinners. If they perform their functions, as prescribed by the social responsibility theory and McQuail's media development theory, which looks at the usefulness of media content in contributing to development in our society, meeting the 2030 realization of the SDGs will be achievable. SDG 16 is very relevant to the media because it focuses on access to information. Social participation and integration, development decision and the preservation of democratic cannot take without access to information.

In addition, the media must have a conducive environment to operate. The media that encounters problems such as a domineering government which is usually the case with state owned media cannot perform its functions freely. Independent public service media should be encouraged to have a more objective and unbiased assessment of national projects. Similarly the influence of the political or business interest on private media may also mar their ability to function objectively. These problems can limit the traditional media from playing their role. The consequence of the media's inability to play its role will be failure of the SDGs. No country wants to be left out of a global developmental project because being left out will be a major setback for any country. Nigeria is going through very difficult times economically; there is a threat of disintegration, terrorism and ethnic crisis. The instability in the county does not create the enabling environment for practising effective journalism as most journalists cannot have access to some volatile areas to carry out their duties or even assess developmental projects in those areas. The present government should endeavour to provide political and economic stability in the country. No country can move forward in development where there is an atmosphere of rancour in terms religious crisis, ethic crisis, terrorism, corruption, disaffection and disunity.

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Biography

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