Role of development journalism in Nigeria’s development

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Introduction

The issue of rural development is one of the most formidable problems facing most of the less-developed countries today, including Nigeria. While a great deal of progress has been made in Asia and Latin America, however, the situation in Africa remains the most problematic, and with up to 70 per cent of its 88.9 million people still living in the yet-to-be-developed rural areas, Nigeria has about the most daunting task of rural development in the continent.

But rural development – the transformation for the better of the physical, psychological, social, economic, political, and cultural conditions of the rural populace – holds the key to national development. It holds the key (1) because of the enormous size of the rural population as compared to the small percentage living in the cities, (2) because of the very large share of the country’s natural resources located in the rural areas, and (3) because of the disproportionate role which the rural population plays in the economic, rural, and political life of the nation.

Successive governments in the country had for decades paid only lip service to the issue of rural development, while the bulk of development efforts and resources was concentrated in the urban areas where the very small minority of the population lives. Even though national development plans have been formulated and executed since 1962, and a federal ministry assigned the responsibility for rural development – the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources, and Rural Development – has been in existence for a long time, nothing substantial was done about rural development up to February 1986.

The public policy approach to the problem took a dramatic turn in the
direction of seeking for an urgent solution when President Ibrahim Babangida established in the Presidency the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) on February 7, 1986 and charged it with the enormous responsibility of developing the vast expanse of the rural areas around the country. Said the President in his budget speech which announced the birth of the directorate:

Rural Development policy will move away from past narrow sectoral pre-occupation with the generation of food and fibre surpluses to overall formulation of a National Rural Development Strategy with emphasis on the alleviation of rural poverty and the enhancement of the quality of rural life.1

The directorate was given the mandate to develop virtually all aspects of rural life, with the President himself as the National Chairman of the Board, each State Governor the Chairman of the State Directorate, and each Local Government Council constituted into a Rural Development Committee. The directorate was given an initial budgetary allocation of N433 million in its first year of operation in 1986, N500 million in 1987, and has ever since continued to get substantial increases in annual monetary allocations for its operations.

With this kind of concerted emphasis at the local, state and national levels and the sustained massive financial support, DFRRI has been busy all over the country providing tarred and untarred rural feeder roads, rural electricity, potable water supply, sanitation services, rural housing services, adult education, and rural manpower development services. It is also providing the rural populace with community rural health education, information services, home economics instruction, food and other agricultural production services, and many other services which space limitation does not permit us to enumerate. The result is that there is scarcely any of the more than 100,000 communities in the country one will turn to without seeing one kind or the other of DFRRI development activities in progress.

Surely, there are occasional, and sometimes biting, criticisms of the directorate in the execution of some of its rural development projects, especially with respect to a number of its untarred rural roads that get washed away at several points by erosion during the rainy season and many of its water boreholes that become dry a few months after commissioning. Nevertheless, the creation and continued funding of the directorate in the way it is today constitute some kind of a revolutionary approach to Nigeria’s process of national development for the following reasons:

1. For the first time in Nigeria’s history, public statements about the need
to develop the rural areas have been followed up with really bold and concrete actions toward comprehensive and rapid rural development.

2. Rural development is now given the level of top priority attention it rightly deserves in national, state, and local government budgetary allocations. A large chunk of federal budget is devoted to rural development annually as allocations to DFRRRI and a number of smaller agencies engaged in rural development activities, such as Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) and River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs). More than 20 per cent of state budgets is earmarked for rural development programmes, almost double the annual average before the establishment of DFRRRI. The number of local government areas in the country has since 1991 been increased from 495 to 589 and about 60 per cent of them are located in the rural areas. Close to 100 per cent of the budgets of these rural local governments is devoted to rural development.

3. For the first time, many rural and suburban communities which had no motorable roads now have them, a number that were never connected to one another by any such roads are now connected, and a large number that had neither potable water nor electricity now enjoy these utilities and some others provided by DFRRRI.

4. Following DFRRRI's mobilization efforts which have given rise to the establishment of many more community development associations, age grade clubs, youth organizations, cooperative societies, and similar organizations, rural residents' developmental consciousness has been highly sensitized and an enormous increase in the people's self-help activities around the country is the logical outcome.

With the grassroots political institutions and activities which have been put in place in the rural areas alongside the various DFRRRI projects and a number of other non-political programmes and activities, such as Community Bank; Better Life for Rural Women; and Mass Mobilization for Economic Recovery, Self-Reliance, and Social Justice (MAMSER), there is now an unprecedented measure of grassroots participation by the rural populace in organized rural development.

What is the nature of development journalism that is being carried on in this kind of rural atmosphere? What role does this journalism practice play as a contributory factor in this developmental process? In what ways can this development journalism be improved in order for it to contribute more effectively to rural, and by extension national, development? The purpose of this paper is to seek for answers to these questions.
Meaning of development journalism

Development journalism is the kind of journalism which pays sustained attention to the coverage of ideas, policies, programmes, activities, and events dealing with the improvement of the life of a people. An important assumption underlying the notion of development journalism is that the mass media have the ability and power to influence the development process by giving coverage to development ideas, policies, programmes, activities, and events. It is precisely the same assumption which informs the idea of 'development communication', a broader and relatively older term which denotes the employment of all forms of communication, and not only the mass media, in the promotion of national development efforts.

The use of the two terms by scholars is overwhelmingly in connection with Third World development, but of course the problem of development is a world-wide phenomenon which concerns all nations and all segments of every nation. Kunczik has defined "development journalism" as "a notion of journalism according to which reporting events of national and international significance should be constructive in the sense that it contributes positively to development of the country concerned." While conceding that development of the human condition is a universal problem, development journalism focuses attention on situations in the less-developed countries and insists that reporting of and commenting on events by the mass media must be constructive and committed to the improvement of the life of the people. This orientation differs from that of Western journalism which holds that news reporting should not take any stand one way or the other but should merely present the facts and allow the people to make up their minds – the usual classical objectivity principle.

Development journalism of course does not reject objectivity per se, but its approach to news reporting is based on the assumption that development is a desirable objective deserving the full support of the mass media. In this respect, it takes the stand that the media have a social responsibility to promote development. Let us see how far this brand of journalism is being applied in the Nigerian situation.

Nature of development journalism in use

Throughout the colonial period from the 1860's to political independence in 1960, there was little mass media coverage of the rural areas. Whatever
coverage that occurred was carried out by urban-based newspapers which were later joined by urban-based radio and television, and the stories written pertain mainly to statements and activities of government officials, such as colonial Residents, colonial Districts Officers and Assistant District Officers, and other such colonial administrative functionaries. Other public figures who made news in the rural areas included tax collectors, mobile medical service staff, inspectors of education, and mobile cinema staffs of the ministries of information who moved from one village to the other with their cinema vans showing public programme films of various kinds to rural audiences.

Nationalist politicians who fought for the country's independence also made news whenever they campaigned in the rural areas. News made by all these sources was of course published in the city media for consumption by city people, and very rarely did ordinary events of everyday life in the rural areas make news for the city media.

What did all these mean for the then 80 per cent of the country's population living in the rural areas? They meant that for the urban-based media of mass communication the rural people did not exist in the real sense of true existence, and even if they existed, they were seen to be incapable in their own rights to make any news worth reporting. This was demonstrated by the fact that the 'development' aspects of news reports dealing with their affairs pertained to what stranger-officials told them or did to them rather than what they themselves said, did to themselves, or contributed to the economic, social, political, and cultural life of the nation.

The reporters who covered rural news for the city media usually came from the cities, and promptly disappeared back to the cities with the stranger-officials who made the news. This meant that rural people had no hand in the reporting of development events occurring in the rural areas, neither did they exercise any control over how or whether those events were reported in the mass media. Thus, the kind of development journalism that existed at that time was typically sporadic in character, uncommitted, remote, and alien, as far as rural people were concerned.

With the formulation and implementation of national development plans in the 1960s and 1970s following the nominal end of British colonialism, the situation began to change gradually. Some attention began to be paid to the establishment of rural newspapers, rural newsletters, and here and there rural magazines as well, for the purpose of providing publicity to and news coverage of the development programmes being run in the rural areas. There was increased tempo in the establishment of such rural media
channels in the 1970s, and even more so in the 1980s when a number of rural communities in Cross River, Kano, Plateau, and Niger States began to be provided with television viewing centres by either their local government councils or their state governments.

Radio had already become widespread in the rural areas. Also some community groups in the rural areas now have their own community newspapers and/or magazines, while a number of daily and non-daily newspapers in the cities have introduced weekly supplements devoted to the coverage of rural news and other rural events.

The most immediate implication of all these is of course that many of the rural areas in the country are now covered more regularly by the mass media than they were in the past. While some of the media responsible for this coverage are still based in the urban centres as in the past, a number of them are securely located in the rural areas. Also, while many of the journalists who report for the media channels live in the nearby cities and commute to their rural beats, some others live in the rural communities.

They have now been joined by another set of journalists – MAMSER mobilization officers and information officers of state ministries of information posted to the 589 local government areas in the country to engage in public enlightenment campaigns, publicity of government policies and programmes, mobilization of the rural populace for rural and national development, and a number of other communication activities, including news coverage and commentaries for both the rural-based and urban-based mass media.

Thus, another important implication of the new development is that the rural people now have not only many more journalists reporting and commenting on their affairs but also some of the journalists living with them as well – in fact, in a number of the communities one or two of the resident journalists are themselves local people. Most of the stringers for the rural and the urban-based media, such as school teachers, health workers, agricultural extension workers and traders, also are rural residents.

But perhaps far more exciting of the new changes than any of the above are the changes in two the sources of rural news are, and in the level of emphasis given to rural development news. For example, a relatively recent content analysis study of two of the leading national daily newspapers in Nigeria – Daily Times and The Guardian – in their coverage of the rural areas showed that, contrary to the expectation that a majority of rural news stories published by the newspapers would have high government officials as their sources, a large proportion of the stories – 67.8% – was provided by
rural residents, and the remaining 32.2% was given out by high government officials who were either visiting the rural areas or addressing news conferences on federal and state government programmes of rural development.6

As expected, however, all the news generated by high government officials were favourable to the federal and state governments, whereas the bulk of the stories given out by the rural sources were unfavourable to those governments. Also, contrary to expectation that the two national dailies would give little or no front page coverage to rural news, their combined front page coverage of rural news constituted 13.6% of their total news, a result which was not statistically different from the 23.6% front page coverage they accorded non-rural news during the four-month period covered by the study.

This study showed that city news still dominated in the pages of the two newspapers as compared to rural news, for 75.5% of the total news stories published by the papers was city news while only 24.5% was rural news. But even this figure of 24.5% was a remarkable improvement on what the situation was in the not very distant past when there was very little media coverage of the rural areas.

The significance of these results can be better appreciated when it is borne in mind that Daily Times and The Guardian are very influential national dailies based in the sprawling city of Lagos from where they managed to give this level of attention to rural development news, including front page coverage. Also important was the fact that the two papers with two different kinds of ownership did not differ in the absolute amounts of coverage they gave to the rural areas. Daily Times, which is 60% federal government owned, devoted 26% of its total news space to rural development news while the privately owned Guardian allotted 22% of its own total news space to such news. The Daily Times’ total was 134 news stories and The Guardian’s was 107 stories – figures which are statistically equivalent.

Another content analysis study of these two newspapers and two other dailies – Daily Star (government owned) and National Concord (privately owned) – two years later, in terms of the influence of ownership on the papers’ coverage of the rural areas, again found that the government papers did not differ from the private ones in the percentages of their total news holes devoted to rural development news.7

These results clearly contradict the frequently stated and unstated contention of government officials that government must continue to retain
dominant ownership of daily and other newspapers in the country in order for those newspapers to give any meaningful attention to rural and national development activities. The newspapers, whether government owned or privately owned, are reasonably sufficiently sensitized to the importance of rural development and are consequently giving it increasing coverage.

While ownership of the media channels plays some role in the shaping of development journalism, reporters, editors, and other professional communicators' professional orientations and levels of commitment to the values of development journalism are likely to be more important in determining the course of development journalism at any moment. In turn, the course that this genre of journalism takes surely plays an important role in the overall process of national development. This is why it is necessary to examine briefly the character and roles of three kinds of journalist (Table 1) who produce development journalism in its various forms, including that aspect of it that deals with life in the rural areas.

Table 1. Kinds of journalist in their professional orientations and degrees of commitment to development journalism

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<th>Kinds of journalist</th>
<th>Professional orientation</th>
<th>Degree of commitment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Conventional journalist</td>
<td>Regular coverage but with professional detachment</td>
<td>Moderate commitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developmental journalist</td>
<td>Ad hoc coverage, project-by-project, with publicity orientation</td>
<td>Low commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development journalist</td>
<td>Regular and total coverage with professional devotion and responsibility</td>
<td>Strong commitment</td>
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Conventional journalist

A conventional journalist, who believes strongly in the orthodox principle of objectivity, exhibits a great deal of professional detachment in his or her day-to-day coverage of development news, according that news the same kind of treatment as other kinds of news stories. While depending on the usual, familiar sources of rural news, such as high government officials and other prominent city people, he/she now and then gives a hearing to rural people as well. He/she also reports comments by news sources and other news events that are critical of government officials and other instituted
authorities, but refrains from engaging in news interpretations and analyses that would put the news events in their proper perspectives.

Moreover, he/she tends to shy away from investigative reporting of events and issues mainly because he/she feels that such reporting is very demanding of time, energy, and skill, but perhaps more importantly because this journalist believes that investigative reporting can be a rather hazardous enterprise that now and then rakes up a great deal of controversy.

All of these demonstrate his/her only moderate commitment to the values of development journalism. It is, however, our journalist's rigid adherence to the old principle of objectivity that qualifies him/her to be regarded as a 'conventional journalist'.

**Developmental journalist**

The term 'developmental journalist' is a derivation from a brand of development communication called 'developmental journalism', which has been described by one communication scholar (Ogan, 1980) as a 'government controlled form of communication'. According to another communication expert (Kunczik, 1988) developmental journalism 'defines journalism's sole function as spreading government views'. Thus, a 'developmental journalist' is that journalist who sees his/her main responsibility as that of publicising government policies, projects, statements, and activities, and who usually avoids communicating the views of the people back to the government, especially when those views are critical of the government, as they very often are.

As can be seen in Table 1, the developmental journalist engages in development journalistic work on an ad hoc basis, that is, whenever there is a particular government development policy or project to publicize. When there is none, he or she does ordinary routine information or government public relations work. This journalist is very often an information officer of the ministry of information or an information or public affairs officer in any other government establishment or parastatal.

He or she also could be a journalist in a government owned media house, but this is not to say that all journalists in government owned media houses are necessarily developmental journalists. Where a good measure of freedom is allowed in government owned media organizations, many journalists in those media organizations could operate in the conventional mode, and some may even choose to function as development journalists. In view of government control and ad hoc coverage, the developmental
journalist’s commitment to the values of development journalism is low.

**Development journalist**

The ‘development journalist’ is the real professional who is body and soul strongly committed to the ideals of development journalism in all its facets and to the interests of the generality of the people whose own initiatives and ideas on development are given full rein in news stories and commentaries. He or she uses all opportunities at his/her disposal to cover development news on a regular basis and with devotion and a high sense of professional responsibility. He or she has a knack for seeing good solid development news stories where some other journalists are incapable of seeing any. No wonder that the development journalist is now and then one of the best known investigative journalists around! In other words, he or she is ‘adept in investigative journalism’ (Nwosu, 1989).

He/she believes that news events become really understandable and meaningful to most members of the public only when they are professionally presented in their true contexts and perspectives. Thus, he/she makes it a point of duty to accompany straight news reporting with interpretations of the news events, through which relevant background information, evaluations of what has happened, meanings of what has happened, relative importance of the events, and the attendant implications are carefully and responsibly presented. It is also these which give life to a news event and help the individual audience member not only to be well informed but as far as possible also to be meaningfully educated, motivated, inspired, and moved into action.

If this interpretative function of a truly responsible journalism is necessary and important in the advanced countries of the world, it is of the essence in the Third World, including Nigeria, where development policies and programmes occupy centre stage, and are implemented at the public and private spheres in a hurry.

When the development journalist engages in news analyses and/or commentaries, he or she does not hesitate to praise where praise is honestly felt to be deserved and criticize where criticism is believed to be appropriate, and without regard to who is involved. Where criticisms are made, these are always accompanied by honest attempts to suggest very constructively what could be done to prevent difficulties, correct mistakes, and solve problems.

What propels the development journalist to operate with so much
dedication is his/her strong commitment to the philosophical value of overriding public interest, the interest which is held to supercede all other considerations. Thus, the development journalist as described here resembles John Merrill’s (1974) ‘Apolonysian journalist’, Morris Janowitz’s (1975) ‘advocate journalist’, and Hugh Culbertson’s (1983) ‘interpretative journalist’, all of which are professional journalistic conceptions identified in the United States of America.

This journalist also is professionally oriented in ways that are similar to those of the ‘self-critical’ journalist isolated by Charles Okigbo (1987) in a factor analysis study of Nigerian journalists. According to Okigbo, the self-critical professional lambasts most of his fellow journalists for owing allegiance to politicians, for engaging in power struggle, for being factious, for performing poorly, for allowing partisanship to colour their professional performance, and for being easily manipulated by people in power. Apparently, this self-critical journalist, by so sharply castigating those who are perceived to be a sell-out to the power structure, solidly identifies himself with the interests and aspirations of the people.

Synthesis

As Table 1 clearly shows, the three types of journalist – the conventional journalist, the developmental journalist, and the development journalist – are all engaged in development journalism; the only thing is that they are engaged in it in varying degrees in accordance with their differing levels of commitment to the values of development journalism and their equally dissimilar orientations to their professional roles. In other words, every journalist in a less developed country produces some measure of development journalism, since development journalism stands at the centre of journalism practice in the less developed countries. Communication scholars (Golding, 1979; Ogan, 1987; Kunczik, 1988) have often made this point about the dominant status of development journalism in the Third World.

While acknowledging this dominant status, however, it is noted that the role of development journalism is not perceived alike by all. For example, while the developmental journalist may agree with government officials that development and popular participation are mutually exclusive, the development journalist takes the opposite stand that there is a necessarily complementary relationship between development and democratic participation, and that it is the responsibility of the press (the term ‘press’ used in its
broader sense) to foster this relationship. As Paul Ansah (1988, 15) has observed, ‘democracy and development are reconcilable and can be pursued concurrently’, and Chen Chimutengwende (1988, 31) argues strongly that ‘there is a crucial link between communication, development and the democratization of society’.

The journalist’s perception of this relationship is important in the structuring of his/her operational approach to the production of development news and other kinds of development information. For all the three categories of journalist, the other factors contributing to the nurturing of their professional orientations and degrees of commitment can vary greatly, but education; professional training; personality characteristics; media ownership patterns; and the prevailing economic, political, and sociocultural contexts are likely to predominate. Appropriate research programmes should be able to indicate the extent to which this conceptualization and the categorizations of the professional journalistic orientations and degrees of commitment hold true.

Idowu Sobowale (1988) tested a model of commitment in which demographic/socio-psychological factors were used to predict to professional value orientations which in turn were used to predict to professional commitment, and reported that ‘the model does not work, at least for Nigerian journalists’ whom he studied. The only meaningful relationship he found was that between 27 demographic/socio-psychological variables on the one hand and the professional value orientations and the professional commitment on the other. However, Sobowale’s definitions of professional orientation and commitment were radically different from the way these variables are conceptualized and defined in this paper. Also, the perception here of the role of the journalist in the development process is different from this.

If research provides support to the conceptualizations and definitions presented here, this would aid in the better understanding of the role which development journalism actually plays in the process of rural and national development, in the light of the different kinds of journalists who are engaged in that journalism.

The current trend in the conceptualization of the role of development journalism is to define it more broadly and more dynamically than the mere conception of it as a kind of journalism used in the promotion of public programmes meant to improve the living conditions of people. Thus, taking a cue from Narinder Aggarwala’s (1979) argument, Hemant Shah (1990) has stated that the proper role of development news is as follows:
Development news should examine critically, evaluate and interpret the relevance of development plans, projects, policies, problems, and issues. It should indicate the disparities between plans and actual accomplishments, and include comparisons with how development is progressing in other countries and regions. It also should provide contextual and background information about the development process, discuss the impact of plans, projects, policies, problems, and issues on people, and speculate about the future of development. And development news should refer to the needs of people, which may vary from country to country or from region to region, but generally include primary needs, such as food, housing, and employment; secondary needs such as transportation, energy sources and electricity; and tertiary needs such as cultural diversity, recognition and dignity (pp. 1035–1036).

Now that the new public emphasis on rural development in Nigeria is having as one of its attendant consequences the beginning of the establishment of rural media of mass communication, what role is development journalism playing in light of what is believed to be its proper role in this dispensation? Let us see the contribution, or at least the potential contribution, which the development journalism emerging from what one may call a rural development revolution in Nigeria is making to the rural development process.

**Potential contribution to rural development**

A long standing anomaly in mass media coverage of the rural areas was, as we pointed out earlier in this paper, failure of the media to give a hearing to rural residents. What government officials and other city residents said about or did in the rural areas were the things that made news, a good example of the trickle-down syndrome. The news reports had little or no meaning to the ruralites, since the reports constituted coverage of the usual government officials and other city-based news makers and not coverage of the rural people and their activities. Now that rural people have begun to be heard through news and other journalistic reports, that some of the rural communities have their own rural newspapers, that more and more of the rural communities have television viewing centres, and that a number of them have even become local government headquarters with all the governmental, legislative, and other developmental activities arising from such new status, these should pose some far-reaching implications for rural development.

The most immediate implication is of course the enhancement of the status of rural people as news makers, many of whom in fact happen to be important decision makers about issues affecting their lives and the lives of
their fellow ruralites. Surely, even before their views and activities began to be given media coverage, most of them were known to their compatriots in the rural areas as opinion leaders and news makers of some sorts, but media reportage of such views and activities could help to widen the scope of their influence within and outside the rural areas.

A related implication is that the real needs, problems, and priorities of the rural people would be better known than was the case before to both the ruralites and those in the cities, including public and private policy makers whose actions and inactions are capable of affecting those needs, problems, and priorities. When this knowledge is available, meaningful and hopefully effective policies, programmes, and activities would then be brought to bear on rural development.

Since the rural newspapers and other rural media outlets would also be reporting on local, regional, national, and international events happening outside their locations, rural people would have the opportunity of becoming well acquainted with those events. The more often such events are reported in the context of how they relate to the lives of the villagers, the greater the chance for the people to see the relevance of their own contributions to the overall scheme of things in the nation, and even in the world as a whole.

Apart from this kind of knowledge of a general nature, media reports can provide ruralites with specific and functional knowledge of things, such as how to filter and preserve clean water for drinking, how to apply fertilizer correctly to food crops, simple health habits, such as keeping clothing and surroundings clean, and the advantage of breast feeding of babies.

The rural newspaper also has the opportunity of setting the agenda of rural and non-rural events for rural residents. As Francis Kasoma (1991) has argued, the rural newspaper could also find itself involved in a situation of reciprocal agenda setting in which it sets agenda of events for the rural people and the people themselves in turn set the agenda of events to be covered by the newspaper. This happens very clearly in what Kasoma calls a ‘participatory rural newspaper’ where rural residents participate in reporting for the newspaper and also take part in deciding on what materials get published in the newspaper. In this way, they identify very intimately with the newspaper.

While, for example, Oriwu Sun of Ikorodu in Lagos State comes very close to meeting this conception of a community newspaper (Janowitz, 1968) serving the rural areas, the Community Concord series of newspapers published in the second half of the 1980’s by multi-millionaire media
mogul, M.K.O. Abiola, did not foot the bill before they went out of business. Even though the papers were meant to concentrate attention on rural development journalism (Akinfeleye, 1987), most of the stories they published were state/urban stories rather than local/rural stories, the stories were written by urban-based reporters for urban-based readers, and the newspapers were all printed in far-away city of Lagos and circulated in state capitals and other urban centres rather than in the rural villages.

Stimulation of literacy among rural residents, motivation of the people to improve their economic and other living conditions, encouragement of public debate of local and national issues, education of the rural people on their right and responsibility to participate actively in the political decisions and activities that affect them, and the glorification of the people's cultural values are among the many other contributions which the rural newspaper could make to rural development.

But it should not be imagined that it is only rural newspapers that are capable of making to rural development these contributions we have been discussing. Of all the mass media, radio has been the most available to people in the rural areas in Nigeria, as in other Third World countries. As Edward Mamutse (1985) has stated, 'the (rural) reporter is a communicator, mobilizer, an inspirer, organiser, animator, and articulator' all boiled into one, irrespective of the medium he/she reports for, and his or her '... copy must exhort, inspire, encourage, and inform'.

Thus, what is important is how the rural reporter and his or her editors handle the news and other copies that get published in the press on rural affairs and not necessarily whether the stories are published in print or electronic media. Of course, certain kinds of copy go better in some kinds of media than in others, but the point being made here is that irrespective of the medium being used, the copy on rural development should be constructed and published in such a way that it has the chance of doing the job for which it meant – that is, contribution to rural development in some way.

In view of some of its important characteristics, radio easily overcomes the barriers of illiteracy and distance better than does the newspaper or any other print medium, and it has been shown to be a very effective medium for use in the rural areas (Moemeka, 1981; Ansah, 1992; Moshiro, 1990; Coldevin, 1991; Moyo, 1990). Ironically, however, radio broadcasting has hardly begun to penetrate Nigeria's rural countryside more than half a century after that broadcasting was introduced in the country.

This was because right from radio's inception in the 1930's, and television's own beginning in the late 1950's, radio and television broadcasting
remained a government monopoly until 1992 when the federal government promulgated a decree permitting private interest in broadcasting. The result was that radio coverage of the rural areas was carried out from radio stations based in only the major cities across the country. Some radio stations have mounted special broadcast programmes devoted to coverage of the rural areas as a means of contributing to the solution of this serious problems, but this cannot be a substitute to rural-based broadcasting stations concentrating on rural coverage.

Promotion and provision of entertainment for rural residents are another important contribution which development journalism is making to rural development, and which it can substantially improve upon as emphasis on rural development progresses. This is an area where the electronic media hold sway in comparison with the contribution made by newspapers and other print media.

Related to entertainment are the issues of recreation and culture. Nigeria is richly endowed with natural and man-made recreational facilities dispersed widely across the country in both urban and rural areas, and the mass media can do the much needed job of identifying, publicizing, and popularizing these facilities in the rural areas and motivating ruralites and urbanites alike to make full use of them.

By devoting the necessary space and air time to the coverage of the rich cultural traditions of the people in the rural areas the media would be making more Nigerians aware and appreciative of this cultural wealth, setting the cultural agenda for the people by persuading them to take pride in their cultural values and thereby feel a sense of belonging, and enhancing the chances of the indigenous culture to contribute to the enrichment of the life of the people.

Nigerians are agreed that industrialization of the country will be more meaningful and more effective when industries begin to move into the rural areas in greater numbers than as at present. Such movement would constitute an economic and social revolution for the country because it would create more paid employments for rural people, check rural-to-urban migration and the growth of urban slums, lead to industrial processing and preservation of agricultural produce – a process which may have a multiplier effect of stimulating the mechanization of agriculture in the long run. Rural industry would also attract to the rural areas more of such amenities as pipe-borne water, electricity, tarred roads, health facilities, and educational and recreational facilities.

Development journalism could play a role here by identifying and
highlighting the industrial potentials locked up in the nation's countryside, and identifying and publicizing industrial initiatives that are increasingly being taken by rural residents. It also could indicate the various types of industrial undertakings that could very readily be established in the rural areas, and highlight the successes being achieved by existing rural industries.

Surely, there are many problems which operate individually and collectively to limit the role which development journalism can play and is playing in the process of rural development in Nigeria. Even though DFRRI, other government agencies, and rural people themselves have been contributing substantially to the provision of such things as roads, water supply, housing, electricity, and health facilities, a great deal remains to be done, including the establishment of rural telephones and efficient and reliable public transportation system, in order to facilitate widespread and effective media coverage of the rural areas.

These problems and others, such as lack of rural industries, the low purchasing power of the rural populace, and a high rate of illiteracy in that population, have tended to act as disincentives to the increasing establishment of rural newspapers and magazines, and government monopoly and half-hearted funding of broadcasting over the years have restricted radio and television to the main urban centres. Thus, the potential of development journalism as a catalyst in the rural development process in Nigeria can only be fully realized when these problems and a number of others like them are meaningfully solved, or at least substantially minimized. For example, even when most of the infrastructural and other problems listed here have been eliminated, the formidable one of a multiplicity of languages will continue to remain to task the ingenuity of the journalist.

Rural newspapers that are attuned to the languages and cultural values of the people must be established side-by-side with rural broadcasting stations in order for the rural populace to have the opportunity to get involved in and benefit fully from development journalism. This desirable situation would be greatly enhanced by a more purposeful adult education policy that pays a greater attention to the rural areas. As Nwuneli (1987) has rightly stated, 'the rural populace are still largely an eavesdropping audience' of the electronic media, until such a time when rural broadcasting stations are able to be established. Concrete suggestions have been made on how such stations can be set up very cheaply and effectively (Nwuneli, 1987; Obidike, 1987).
Implications for national development

In view of the pre-eminent position which the rural areas occupy in the life of Third World countries, Nigeria included, any contribution made by development journalism to the rural development process is an important contribution to national development. Since the vast majority of the population resides in the rural areas, it follows that the greatest percentage of the potential labour force in the nation, the largest percentage of the actual and potential electorate, and the overwhelming proportion of the nation’s cultural wealth are to be found in the rural areas. The role of development journalism in providing information, adult literacy, education, entertainment, motivation, and general enlightenment in respect of these human factors would constitute a great boost to the national development process.

The same conditions hold in the economic sphere. The rural countryside has the land, the agricultural wealth that provides food for the nation, and the mineral and other natural resources that make the country’s economy move. Development journalism may not provide the money, equipment, and manpower needed for the exploitation of this vast economic wealth, but it does occupy a very prominent position in the whole equation of the process of national development (Edeani, 1980; Kunczik, 1988).

Summary and conclusion

This paper has tried to show that journalism practice in the service of rural development in Nigeria began in earnest only after the launching of the federal government’s revolutionary rural development policy in the second half of the 1980s, concretized by the creation in 1986 of the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) which was charged with the responsibility for a comprehensive development of the rural areas of the country. Instead of the hit-and-run type of journalistic reporting of rural affairs that prevailed before the beginning of this rural development policy, the development journalism which gets the rural people genuinely involved in the telling of their own stories has begun to take hold.

In this task, three types of development journalist can be identified. They are the conventional journalist who reports on rural development issues with professional detachment and only moderate commitment to the values of development journalism, the developmental journalist who reports on
rural development issues on an ad hoc basis with low commitment, and the development journalist who reports on rural development issues on a regular basis with professional devotion and responsibility and who is strongly committed to the values of development journalism.

In the present dispensation, development journalism has a great potential for making real, lasting contributions to rural and national development. But the momentum created by the new public policy on rural development must be sustained and even improved upon as much as possible for this potential contribution by development journalism to become a reality. The many institutional, demographic, and socio-cultural problems that still stand in the way of rural development must be solved, and rural media of mass communication, including rural broadcasting, need to be given more serious and concrete attention in order for the new rural development journalism to have real meaning.

Notes

2. The DFRRI was merged with the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Development, while the MAMSER was merged with the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, all in January 1993 and for administrative purposes.
3. While the term ‘Development Communication’ can be said to have been in use since the 1950s, ‘development journalism’ as a concept was created in 1967, see Michael Kunczik, Concepts of Journalism North and South, Bonn: Courier-Druck, 1988, p. 85.
4. Ibid., p. 83.
5. As opposed to the present situation where, according to the census, the proportion of rural population is now about 70 per cent of the total, the size of this segment of the country’s population was 80 per cent during the colonial and most immediate post-colonial periods.
6. Another interesting aspect of the results of this study was that urban news and rural news received about the same amount of front page treatment, a finding which was completely at variance with the expectations that rural news would not receive front page treatment. See Ifeoma C. Amajo, ‘Coverage of Rural Areas by Nigerian Newspapers’, an unpublished bachelor of science thesis, Anambra State University of Technology, Enugu, 1988, 21–24.
8. Michael Kunczik regards this developmental journalism that spreads government views as a ‘government-say-so-journalism’, see Kunczik, op. cit., p. 84.


10. While commitment is, for example, conceived here to mean commitment to the values or role of development journalism in the development process, it was conceived by Sobowale to be commitment to the organization where the journalist worked (‘organization commitment’), commitment to the journalism profession generally (‘professional commitment’), and commitment to the specific journalistic task in which the journalist was engaged (‘task commitment’).

References


