

Radio Theatre and Community Education towards Agricultural Development in Benue State: An Appraisal of the CEC/IFPREB Farmers Radio Plays

By

Jonathan Desen Mbachaga PhD

Department of Theatre and Media Arts, Federal University Oye - Ekiti, Ekiti state

Email:desenmbachaga@yahoo.com. Phone Number: 08039238155

Abstract

The main thrust of this paper is to examine radio theatre and its role in community education especially in the area of agricultural education. It argues that if used in an effective and holistic manner, radio theatre can be one of the most effective strategies for promoting development among a hugely illiterate population. Ultimately, the paper looks at how radio drama was utilized by CEC/IFPREB in collaboration with the Theatre Arts Department of Benue State University Makurdi, to disseminate agricultural information to local farmers in Benue state regarding the protection of their crops from yam beetles and how to treat and manage the health of their animals. The paper submits among others that; despite the popularity of the plays, the program lacked the component of 'Local Listening Clubs' in the research communities which would have given target audience – farmers in rural areas the opportunity to collectively analyze, discuss, and clarify issues with experts and extension workers on the field regarding issues in the radio plays. The paper concludes that, radio drama has become an imperative tool in providing accurate, up to date information to illiterate, peasant poor farmers in Nigeria in a bid to boost agricultural production, provide food security and enhance economic growth.

Key Words: *Radio Drama, Agricultural Education, yam beetles, rural farmers*

Introduction

Drama is indeed a very dynamic art. It can be used for a diverse number of things. Its importance can be summarised in three functions ascribed to it – education, entertainment and information. These three functions make it possible for drama to be utilized to achieve various ends. (Foluke, 1996)

The place of drama in education is indisputable because drama as an instrument in education has been used variously by practitioners to explore behaviour, intentions and interactions between people and at present is widely accepted and used extensively by development workers and communicators. One can therefore boldly say that drama as a participatory approach has gained importance in qualitative and participatory research.

Over the last decade, there has been an intense quest by government and support agencies towards

national and rural development. Several avenues have been used and radio drama as an approach is in the forefront of these approaches especially when the programs aired are targeted at marginalized rural populations.

The West African regional seminar on mass communication research held in Lagos 1975 echoed this when it submits that; "Radio is a powerful channel in the task of rural enlightenment in countries with transportation problems, and scattered and far flung populations". (Moemeka, 1981)

The potency of radio drama is emphasized in the above quote because it can be utilized to throw light on issues, inspire, action and direct community and individual activities that will eventually lead to social change.

It is pertinent to note here that the educational concept of drama has undergone a revolutionary change in the last two decades. The shift has been basically from using drama as mere entertainment to the use of drama for instruction and social engagement at every slightest opportunity both in media and on the field as a result of its potency in enhancing development communication.

Over the years, when education is mentioned and it has to do with the rural poor, the first impression that comes to mind is the formal class room, teacher and student relationship. The kind of approach that Paulo Friere the popular adult educator refers to as the '**banking approach**' in which the students are just passive recipients that never contribute to the experience.

However, community communication and indeed radio drama for rural people here becomes the lubricant that enhances development among rural poor people as it is utilized to provide new knowledge using the cultural language and ethos of the people to mobilise them towards social action.

Development agencies like DFID, CEC/IFPREB, Sfh, LATH, Access to Justice- Nigeria, and so many others have utilized radio theatre as a veritable tool to disseminate key development messages to

promote various development themes. These programmes range from health promotion programmes such as the “one thing at a time” radio drama by Kola Ogunjobi, to the ‘I need to know’ radio drama of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria and the play of the week dramas of the radio Benue Makurdi, which basically focuses on the satiric commentary on social events in the state.

In this case, radio theatre was utilized to disseminate agricultural information to farmers in Benue state. The two episodes discussed here were used to project issues such as the use of herbs to treat animals and traditional methods to cure ailments in animals to rural farmers in Benue state under the auspices of CEC/IFPREB a program funded by DFID.

Community education as a concept aims at unleashing the intellect as well as the potential embedded within rural and urban people. It envelopes events that cut across social, economic, educational, justice, political, health and cultural issues, that affect the daily lives of the people.

Moemeka citing Lowe discusses the concept of community education and posits that:

“All attempt to change attitude and behaviour involve the educative process, since in order to change, people must first acquire fresh knowledge, insights and skills”. (Moemeka, 1981)

In the above sense, Moemeka sees education as the prime key to motivating people to action; what he described as “a nourishing blood stream that courses through all aspects of rural community development”.(Moemeka,Ibid)

Else where, Mbachaga (2012) posits that; “Community education through drama can therefore be seen as a process of utilizing the transformative potential of drama for broadening and opening towards a new type of awareness”.

Radio drama in the light of the above plays a significant role in creating a strong environment in which fresh knowledge and skills are effectively communicated to the rural populace.

It is in line with the need to educating farmers in Benue State that the IFPREB project was established and supported with funds from the Department for International Development (DFID) of the British Government with the aim of enhancing the ability of agricultural research, training of members in development agencies, to meet the information needs and skills of **resource poor farmers** in Benue State.

As such, this paper discusses the use of radio drama in agricultural education in Benue state. Part one of this Paper gives a background that highlights the place of drama in education, part two looks at the history and objectives of CEC/IFPREB, part three looks at Agricultural education and National Development, part four forms the discussion and critical reflections.

Objectives of CEC/IFPREB in Benue State

The Cooperative Extension Centre (CEC) of the University of Agriculture Makurdi was established in the early 1990's as a unit within the university to provide extension services to the farming community within its catchment area. The unit functions as a link between the University and the farming community. In carrying out its function, CEC was expected to build capacity not only amongst the local farmers, but also within those other local organisations which are involved in agricultural work. IFPREB on the other hand as earlier mentioned was a DFID funded project targeting rural poor farmers in Benue State.

It is important to note here that the objectives of IFPREB are therefore a subset of the objectives of CEC in that – IFPREB's activities were focused specifically on poor farmers in rural Benue.

Thus, in order to effectively carry out its activities, IFPREB worked in collaboration with the CEC staff as well as the staff and students of the Theatre Arts Department of Benue state university Makurdi who under the Leadership of Professor Alachi James had the mandate of developing radio

drama episodes that were broadcast by Radio Benue on the program *Profitable Agriculture* so as to enhance the dissemination of agricultural information to rural poor farmers in the state.

The radio plays were technically screened by the IFPREB management regarding the presentation and effective coverage of key issues that ought to reflect in the skits after which approvals were given for the recording at the CEC studio and subsequent broadcast on *Profitable Agriculture* by Radio Benue.

Agricultural Education and National Development: An Overview

The mission of agricultural education, according to NAAE cited in Anugwa (2006) "is to prepare and support individuals for careers in agriculture and to **build awareness** of and develop leadership for food, fibre, and natural resource systems".

This means that enhancing access and availability of new knowledge to farmers is vital so that the social and economic growth of the nation is made possible.

Communication for development aptly finds a place in this instance because it involves the process of disseminating information and messages as well as sharing information so as to promote new behaviour patterns. Mbachaga (2012) discussing this kind of education submits that; " Development communication basically involves communicating vital facts of life to people with the aim of finding better ways to help them enhance or improve their well being".

It is imperative to note here that, communication gaps still exist between the urban and the rural populace because access to up to date information is not equal. It is true that development is strongly desired and pursued by individuals, Governments and donor bodies across the globe and it tops the agenda of most governments especially third world countries but grassroots development still stares these governments in the face despite the campaigns and various policies.

Suffice to say that, scientific breakthroughs are an ongoing process which is easily accessed by people with formal education through the mass media. However, the larger population in the rural areas who cannot read and write are cut off. This means that to develop and build our people in the right direction our education must target rural populations and aim at making them to understand their environment and know what new things – development, that is happening around them so they can be in a position to adjust and change to meet the demand of the time.

Egun (2009) reiterates this when he submits thus;

The role of agriculture in the national economy should be re-emphasized and factors influencing agricultural activities and food security put in place. There is the need for sensitization and enlightenment of the rural areas which accommodate the greater percentage of the populace. The use of media such as the radio, posters and the television could assist in informing the people of the latest developments in agriculture.

Access to new knowledge is therefore necessary because for rural farmers to improve on existing practices and embrace new changes in agriculture especially the technologically inclined. This will go a long way in increasing the farm yields and improving the food security of our nation and reduce poverty among resource poor farmers.

SYNOPSIS OF SOME OF THE IFPREB RADIO PLAYS

Annual Syndrome

Zaki Tor Beeka is the clan head of Pav, he is in his palace when Bonji a peasant walks in drunk and singing his misery song. The village head inquires what the matter is and the drunk narrates his story of how he has lost all his goats to the epidemic ravaging the community. In fact, not just him but even the two kindred's have been submerged in the epidemic and their goats and chickens have been dying in hundreds. Interestingly, the two kindred heads accuse one another of using witchcraft to bewitch his kindred. An extension worker is brought in to help find a solution to the crisis and she explains that it is an epidemic Chicken coccidiosis, chicken lice as well as goat diseases and suggests that farmers should learn to immunize their animals and seek veterinary expertise and guidance when animals get sick.

Yam Beetles

Akenabo is a peasant farmer with two wives. The yam seeds of his younger wife have holes in them which bring about poor harvest every year. The younger wife therefore accuses the first wife of using witchcraft and juju to spoil her farm. To her, it is because Ashi is barren and has no children to feed, that is why she destroys her farm so that her children will die of hunger. A fight ensues between the two women and attracts a neighbour Korchan who tries to intervene to no avail. Akenabo returns at this point and meets the fight. On making enquiries, he is told what transpired and decides to visit the oracle to hear what the village priest will say but Ahungwa who is also affected by the pests decides that they seek the help of an Agricultural extension worker where they are told that pests and beetles are responsible for the poor yields and they are shown the remedies which they take back to their wives and that year the farms yields are better and they all celebrate.

Discussions and Critical Reflections

The radio plays of the CEC/IFPREB project were developed to support the projects information network. The radio plays were written in English and translated into two local dialects spoken in the state – Tiv and Idoma. The themes of the radio plays covered the following;

- Compost manure preparation
- Students attitude towards Agricultural Science
- Use of herbs to treat animals
- Control and eradication of yam pests and beetles

Radio drama skits of 15 and 30 minutes were developed on the above themes and aired on the Radio Benue programme tagged “**Profitable Agriculture**”. These plays enjoyed a wide coverage and popularity in the state but one major set back has been identified that hindered the impact as presented below.

The main flaw, was Lack of feed back – The radio drama broadcasts of CEC/IFPREB did not allow for or create room for audience response. In other words, it did not create an avenue whereby ideas

will be exchanged or the broadcast messages can be discussed with the listeners – rural poor farmers. Thus, the messages that were broadcast were top down and one way.

It is imperative to note here that the problem of rural people is that, they live in a situation where their expression is continually and totally repressed and inhibited and their social capacity underestimated by development planners and policy makers. Suffice to say that at the heart of development communication is the issue of motivating participation, expression, and collective decision making among the people regarding what needs to be changed and how it will be changed thereby leading to development.

The core issue here is the situation where people are given opportunities to be part of the development process. This takes us to the issue of participation in projects. This is because, if any efforts are been made to change the situation of rural poor farmers their involvement and active participation should be a priority.

The interactive participation mode would be appropriate here because with this mode, People participate in joint analysis, which leads to action plans for which all participants take responsibility. These groups of people have a role in the decision-making process and therefore take ownership for implementation. Here, the people are no longer treated as objects to be handed information but subjects who are actively involved in the process from onset.

Effective communication is communication that allows for feedback. For instance, the play on the use of herbs to treat animals disseminated information on how to use local herbs to treat animals but the average villager who has certain misgivings could not respond immediately to ask question regarding what he or she wants clarified even if they had listened to the skit. Feed back here would have been achieved if the messages that were broadcast through the radio drama should have been fol-

lowed with 'local group discussions' of such messages with the guidance of professional extension workers and experts in such areas concerned.

The implication of the above is that, 'local listening clubs' would have been established in target communities to enhance the participation of the listening audience in the local communities.

Despite the weakness stated above, the program had its strengths which include;

1. The utilisation of the people's local languages as a major means of dissemination. The recommendations of the first International Theatre Institution I.T.I./UNESCO International colloquium/workshop on the theme, social role of the theatre and its mission in present - day society in Africa at the national theatre, Lagos in April 1978 made specific comments regarding the use of indigenous languages and recommended that;

- African languages should be used wherever possible, if our languages are to survive.
- That African playwrights and dramatists seek to evolve a means of communication in the theatre which does not alienate the African masses. The African theatre must communicate in the language of the people. (In Adelugba, 2008).

The above lays emphasis on the fact that development advocates in Africa have realized that in order not to alienate the people for whom development is sought, communicating in the people's own language is not only necessary but imperative.

The radio skits in this program were aired in two (2) local languages spoken in the state namely, Tiv and Idoma in line with the above recommendation. This boosted the acceptance and identification with the skits.

The core issue here is that, most times radio programs targeting the rural people for social change

bear the imprints of an alien language understood only by elites and educated people in the cities. The radio drama skits of Kola Ogunjobi's 'one thing at a time' which treats HIV/AIDS issues as well as the play of the week on Radio Benue Makurdi which is a radio play that is popular among the urban masses because its content is topical and engages social issues and problems that cover areas such as health, prostitution, domestic violence, and HIV/AIDS awareness etc but the popularity of these programs among the elites is due to the language of communication - English which cuts off the illiterate peasants in the rural areas.

2. The utility of the various cultures and traditional practices of the key tribes in the content of the radio skits.

Tor (2003) reiterates this when he observes that;

Most development approaches in the past failed because development actors ignored democratic cultural possibilities that meet or share the historical realities of the people concerned... treatment of development issues cannot isolate cultural dimensions.

In the case of the CEC/IFPREB radio drama skits, traditional proverbs and songs featured prominently in the plays which enriched its local content.

Conclusion

Good agricultural education targeting illiterate, peasant poor farmers is an imperative towards sustainable agricultural production, solving food problems of Nigeria as well as economic growth enhancement. This is because; the bulk of agricultural products in Nigeria comes from these poor peasants in rural communities.

Radio drama has become a significant art form in development communication as it is a veritable tool for informing, educating and communicating issues across to audiences. However, to be able to provide accurate information and facts and figures to the majority of the masses, especially illiterate peasant farmers and their families, the communication chain must make room for the peasants to active-

ly participate in the issues that are broadcast in the skits, what Patrick Alumuku (2006) describes as the "participation explosion ... that aims at creating understanding within areas it operates thereby nurturing an atmosphere in which stability and progress can be achieved".

This can be achieved by using participatory communication approaches that are inclusive and which emphasize the process of communication that integrates the communities to meet and collectively solve problems.

References

- Adelugba, D. (2008). " A key note address, presented at Three decades of Tfd in ABU, 24th - 29th February
- Andrew, A.M. (1981). *Local Radio: Community Education for Development*. Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press Ltd.
- Anugwa, F.O. (2006). "Agricultural Education and National Development ". In *Education for National Growth and Stability*. A.O. Ochu (Ed). Makurdi: Peace Makers Publishing Company. 5 - 15
- Egun, A.C. (2009). " Focusing Agricultural Education for Better Productivity in Nigeria in the 21st Century". Doi: 10.1080/09751122.2009.11889980
- Foluke, A. (1996). " Theatre and Media in Nigerian Politics". In *Theatre and Politics in Nigeria*. Jide Malomo and Saint Gbilekaa (Ed.). Ibadan: Caltop Publications (Nigeria) Limited. 122 - 129
- Mbachaga, D. J. (2012). " Theatre for Development and Community Education Towards Safe Motherhood: A Study of Selected Communities in Benue State". An unpublished Ph.D Thesis Presented for the Award of Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theatre Arts of the University of Abuja - Nigeria.
- Patrick, T.A. (2006). *Community Radio for Development: The World and Africa*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.
- Tor, J. I. (2003). *Theatre, Community Organising and Development Action: The Role of Intermediary Organisations in Nigeria*. An Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis in the Department of Theatre and Communication Arts. Submitted to the School of Postgraduate Studies, University of Jos.