

## **Radio Drama And Development**

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### **Abstract**

The radio drama has been accepted as a virile programme outlet. This is as a result of the diffusive tendency of the radio medium, and the relative less-expensiveness of the radio set, which has ensured its popularity, even among the rural population. The radio drama, therefore combines the didactic propensity of drama as a mode of communication and the popularity of the radio medium to present a setting which could very well be utilized in the process of development communication. This paper sets out to explore the plausibility and possibility of this utilization, and goes on to suggest organizational and playcreation strategies that could engender an effective employment of radio drama in development communication.

### **Introduction**

The radio is an aural medium. Like its electronic counterpart, the television, it is an intimate medium - (i.e. it belongs to the home, offices and even moves with humans in their transport systems). As a result of its portability, Ijioma (1988:213) holds that "it has the capability of reaching people and areas otherwise thought inaccessible". Although the medium is constrained by its nature as a purely aural medium of information dissemination, Iji (1996:42) highlights its advantages as a medium

with inexhaustive reach and penetration; with relatively simpler methods of broadcasts to reach far and wide; appealing to both the blind and the sightful persons.

Boeren and Epskamp (1992:26) also note the inability of the radio medium to demonstrate visually, but state that it "can stimulate, interest and the

imagination of the learner". They further that although the messages of the medium are gone with the waves that carry them, the medium has a highly positive attribute of being able to cross literacy barriers. Many countries, like Nigeria, possess expansive land mass and the need for a potent diffusive information system that could reach a large number of persons at the same time becomes pertinent.

Radio is an intensive informant, and we learn from its messages. It has the capacity of widening a person's perception beyond the confines of his immediate surroundings. Through it one gets information directly about national and international happenings. The story of the successful adoption of new methods and communal attainments in one community is capable of raising the aspirations of persons in another.

The aim of the paper is the provision of basic facts about the radio medium: the nature of the medium, its inherent problems in development communication, its general popularity and how it could be better adapted for the gingering of development. This writer has, over the years, observed the misuse of the medium. Instead of a conscious attempt to use the medium as diffusive as the radio for development purposes, the medium is being used for political grandstandings and partisan propaganda. This paper therefore suggests modalities for the more positive employment of the radio medium in development.

### **Limitations**

But the issue of media effects, and the capability of radio, and indeed, the broadcast media to induce change, has continued to elicit debate in communication circles. In an interview with the researcher, Keith Hart, a one-time Director of the African Studies Centre, University of Cambridge, England, cautions that the ability of the media to create changes in attitudes should not be generalized and exaggerated so as not to lead to wrong and superficial conclusions. However, he believes that the mass media could influence certain behavioural patterns.

Gerrard Mansell, a former Deputy Director of the British Broadcasting Corporation, BBC, (in an interview with this writer in 1992) cites the after-election complaints of media bias by losing politicians as an attestation of peoples' belief in the influential capability of the radio. Yet, he maintains that such could be mostly people who are hovering and not certain. He adds;

‘there are people who believe that the impact of broadcasting is a direct cause to effect impact. I don’t believe that is true. The impact is much more diffused over the years. It takes much more time.’

Wilbur Schram(1964:132) shares these views when he states that mass communication has never proved effective in attacking attitudes, values and social customs. He furthers that the mass media can affect lightly held, slightly canalized stronger attitudes, over a period of time.

Schram’s contention is that the use of the mass media should go be with personalized contacts by development agents. For as he puts it

the greatest battles of development are continuing ones, and the result comes less from the impact of single messages or single media than from a succession of impact of related messages and re-forcing them

This is corroborated by Katz and Weddel (1991:18)who hold that

deep rooted attitudes cannot easily be changed by exposure to the media alone. Attitudes are most influenced by mass communication when the latter are linked with, and reinforced by agents in the field.

The cautiousness of these commentators could be understood within the context of the inherent weakness of the radio and the broadcast media group. Its information flow has always tended to be unidirectional, without ample provision for feedback. Andrew Moemeka(1981:212) says that “vertical channels are characterized by centralization(...) Vertical lines (...)can only convey(...) information(...) this information leads only to a few changes in behaviour”.

Various researchers and communication commentators have continued to condemn the top-bottom approach of information inherent in radio broadcasting, especially in the rural development process. The days are ebbing when development was viewed as planned change by public agencies based outside the rural areas. Tony Momoh(1990:17) holds such information system an anathema to the development process:

The masses should no longer be regarded as mere receivers of information in the new perspective. The aim of communication today must be to achieve a two-way process with information flowing from the government to the people or from the people back to the government.

And Amienyi (2000:10) rules that development

cannot be expected to succeed when it is constantly being initiated from outside. Local initiatives and skills must serve as the foundation.

The radio is an intimate medium. Its major place is the home. It is also a portable medium as it could be carried about or made to form part of a transportation system. This intimacy makes it a medium of premium choice in the theatre for development education and communication process. The message that is sent through the medium could reach a good number of persons in different places at the same time. But this intimacy also has adverse implications, which the development theatre organizers must not ignore. Unlike in the formal theatre which has a confined experience with near-exclusive attention to the performance on stage, the radio is competing for the attention of the listener with many other plausible interests. Apart from the fact that the radio set itself can enable immediate change from one station to another, the listener has alternative interests like the television, the video, the telephone, the spouse, the children, friends, relations, etc. Therefore to capture the listener and pass the message of developmental responsibility to him, the theatre programme has to be such that could captivate and sustain his interest.

One of the greatest limitations to the use of the radio theatre in the development communication process is its lack of provision for feedback. Although modern programmers have devised a method of earning feedback, through phone-in programmes, and the creation of other programmes where the views of listeners are articulated, these do not cover all programmes in a station's schedule. Besides, some of such programmes lack immediacy, a vital characteristic of radio broadcasting. A credible method of circumventing this failure is the employment of the medium as one in an integrated development education programme. Communication commentators seem to have agreed that mixing the media is

more effective than the use of any single medium. For instance, in an integrated situation where the radio theatre method is a part, local extension workers could visit some communities and participate in the listening sessions. At the end of the programme on air, the listeners could be made to discuss the development issues raised, with a view to articulating the ways out of the community's development problems. Care must however, be taken in the selection of the communities to be visited on a particular broadcast period. The organizers should keep a development data bank where the problems of various communities are clearly stated. During each broadcast session, where a specific development problem is in focus, communities identified to have such problems are those that deserve visitations by the local extension workers. Just as in the after-performance discussion of the theatre for development (TFD) models, the responsibility of the extension agents is to provide forum for community members to engage in after-listening discussions on the development problems as presented in the radio theatre programme. This way the problem of feedback could be reduced in radio theatre, thus encouraging the use of the popular outlet for the societal responsibility of development education.

In spite of these limitations, communication researchers have agreed that the radio medium can be utilized in advocacies for change. In *Changing Communication and Values in Peru, Guided Case Study of Change* Allan R. Holmberg (1999:62-63) reports that in bringing the rural people "into the life and attitudes and stored knowledge of the nation, the media plays a leading role as soon as the first stage, which entails inter-personal explanations and demonstrations was over".

The All India Radio in New Delhi has been into "Farm and Housing Broadcasting", aimed at educating the rural people generally towards better rural life, and most importantly, to provide farmers with agricultural information that will lead to increase in yield. Part of this has been the Agricultural Package programme aimed at the adoption of practices such as improved seed, or of green manure, or sowing of paddy rice in rows, instead of scattering the seeds.

Radio Tanzania had been mounting a vigorous agricultural campaign since the sixties. This was part of the 'Ujama' package to raise the developmental consciousness of the Tanzanian rural dwellers.

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that the radio has been in popular usage. The medium has advanced as a credible rural development mobilizer. It is cheaper to own and does not require the use of much external accessories. *Out of the Silent Land* (1984:86) a report of the task force on aboriginal broadcasting communications in Australia, submits that “radio may prove a very useful medium for remote indigenous people”.

These positive assertions have not lost sight of the radio’s mono-perspective deficiency. But the commentators are pragmatically examining the prevailing situation, especially in the developing countries, where the rural dwellers have easier access to radio sets than the television. Amienyi(2000:2) reports that the number of radio sets in Africa has increased from the 46 million in 1987 to 141 million in 1996, showing an increase of 228.7%.He adds that there were 103 radio sets per 1,000 Africans in 1980, which increased to 191 in 1996. African’s share of the world radio sets was 3.8% in 1980 but increased to 6.5% in 1996.

And in Nigeria,

the radio is one of the few media of mass communication that could be said to have approached the concept of what could be called a mass medium. (Nwuneli: 1984:10)

It is hoped that theatre in this medium, if properly planned could be a veritable outlet for development communication and education.

### **Playwriting Strategies**

Since the radio is purely an aural medium, radio theatre is fundamentally a theatre for the blind. The radio message is meant only for the ear. Therefore the facilitators of a radio theatre for development communication project should craft the script to meet the demands of the hearing but blind audience. His work, he should note, could not be interpreted through the sight and motion elements like the actor’s body, costume, scenery, lighting, blockings and stage businesses. E.H.Ikpe (1991:77) suggests that the images in the script “must be created through the senses for the listeners to see, feel, touch, smell and taste in the mind.”

## Plot

The ingredients of the plot for the radio medium development theatre might not be fundamentally different from those of the formal stage and community theatre projects. The essential difference is that while the other two are created with the actor's body and the mise en scene elements, those of the radio are all compressed into sound. But basically, Rosemary Horstman (1988:24) stresses that 'the classic elements without which effective drama cannot exist (...) an initial conflict, mounting tension, a climax, and a resolution', must be there.

The creation of a good conflict is very important in playmaking. A well-conceived conflict is capable of attracting the listener who is interested in finding out how the issues in contention would be resolved. Such conflicts could include: the clash between a reckless, vicious businessman who has bribed prominent members of the community council to support his selfish exploitation of the communal forest resources, and a young courageous development crusader who is committed to the bid to save the community from further degradation; the attempt by a selfish traditional priest to exploit the village's development situation to meet his selfish ends and the opposition he meets from the elder of the village church ; and the clash between the effects of development stagnation and the bid by a poor, struggling but ignorant community to extricate itself from such forces.

As an intimate medium, the radio is struggling for attention from myriads of other interests competing for the listeners' ears. For a play, indeed any programme, to captivate the interest of the listeners, it must be really interesting. Apart from the establishment of a strong conflict, the tension that results from the clash must be properly managed to sustain listenership to the end of the play. Contributing to the discourse on conflict and tension, Horstman (1988:26) suggests the likening of the sequence of scenes in a play to foothills of a mountain:

As the foothills rise and fall, each one getting higher than the last until the summit is reached, so should each scene be a microcosm of the whole, with its own internal tension, climax and resolution.

She furthers:

Let us suppose our play tells the story of a man climbing a mountain. The plot is constructed so as to give him various difficulties and hazards to overcome and brings him into contact with other characters who interact with him.

In striving to overcome the barriers to the realization of each other's goals, the major characters in the play engage themselves in a series of reciprocal actions that constitute the dramatic action of the play. The tension generated by each attempt to undo each other, and the reaction or reciprocation by the other person or group, propels the play forward, raising the listeners' attentive curiosity as to how the series of actions would end.

A development theatre project on radio should be an exercise in clarity and simplicity. The plot should be simple enough to easily present the play's message. Complex plots and flashbacks should not be allowed in such projects. As a mono-perceptive medium, it would amount to an overstretch of the audience's listening convenience to indulge in such complexities. It must be noted that the immediate reaction of a radio listener to a programme that is difficult to understand, is to switch over to another radio station or another competing interest. Simplicity should therefore be the watchword in the development radio theatre. The plays should be 'mono-plots'- one-plot arrangements. There should hardly be sub-plots. And the previous actions should be represented through the scatter and spatter method. Such previous actions should be carefully fixed in the dialogic expressions of the present action to enable the listener have ideas about what had transpired in the story before the playwright's point of attack or starting point of the play.

By virtue of its mono-perceptive characteristic, the radio theatre may ordinarily seem an easy creation. But in reality, it is not so. A radio play, especially one that espouses issues as scientific as the environment, must be highly imaginative. Every important feature of the story must be represented in the play through sound that must be appropriately understood by the audience. Epskamp and Boeren (1992: 27) hold that "in a radio broadcast the core problem that evolves in the story-telling tradition is the semiotic process of 'translating' visual signs into aural/oral signs'.

Apart from the exposition of action through dialogue, sound effects should also be used. As a development discourse, the development radio theatre should include sound effects to give impressions of actuality.

(...) in the radio play, the (...) tree only becomes scenery if its leaves can be heard rustling, in other words, if the tree is put into motion and this motion produces a suggestive and recognizable sound.  
(Horstmann: 1988:2)

Sound effects could also establish actions and situations like the felling of trees, and the period of the day (through cockcrow and early morning chirping of insects). What the development playwright lost, in terms of the opportunity to fully present his actions through the other senses, he could regain through the utilization of sound effects. Horstman (1988:3) opines that the crafting of the radio script does not mean

that the contributions to total experience made by the other four senses should be ignored. Rather, the writer must cunningly incorporate these contributions in his work.

### **Character**

The creation of characters in the development communication play on radio entails the same foundational ingredients as the formal stage and community theatres, but with additional demands of adapting them to the blind medium. The major characters should hold opposing polar attitudes that enable the emergence of conflict. The characters should evolve and reveal themselves in the course of the dramatic action.

The characters in the development radio play should be orally consistent. Each of them should possess a personality that is easily identified aurally. Although much of this could be realized through an effective casting, the primary responsibility of ensuring this is that of the scriptwriter. It is also his responsibility to ensure that the characters speak consistently throughout the play. This enables the listener to recognize the personality of each character through the way he/she talks. In order to ensure aural identification of the characters, the playwright must limit the number of roles especially in each

of the scenes of the play. The existence of too many characters, especially in one scene, is capable of causing aural confusion in the mind of the listener. Once this happens, understanding is impaired. Development plays set in a village situation may have crowd scenes, which are typical occurrences in communal situations. But the speaking roles for such scenes should be limited, and unified lines should be sparingly used as they could pose problems for the audience to identify the characters.

The call for limitation in the number of characters should not be misconstrued for the creation of two-character plays, as this would be more difficult to handle. It takes extra ingenuity to create two character dramatic works, (on radio or stage) that could effectively contain the ingredients of plot capable of sustaining the interest of the audience, especially in an development play, the basis of which is change advocacy.

### **Diction**

As a purely aural medium, the diction of an development radio play deserves attention. The playwright should note that he is writing entirely for the ear. He should therefore create images that would enable the listener' see the pictures in the minds' eye.

Such imagination would be difficult to the average listener if the playwright employs words that are difficult to understand. The words should be simple and familiar to the listener. The listener does not have enough time to think of or refer to the dictionary for the meaning of words before continuing with the rest of the play. The playwright should also avoid sparingly-used words and those that are difficult to understand. Many words in the development discourse fall within this group. Since they can hardly be left out of the development play, the playwright should device a technique where such technical terms are followed with explanations of their meaning, in simple, familiar words.

The development playwright should note that the radio is a passive medium. What is said on it dissolves into the air, leaving no room for referrals as in the print medium. The playwright should therefore ensure that the listener that tunes in the course of the play, has an idea of what the play is all about. This could be effected through the use of repetitions, especially of the key words in the play, to accentuate meaning

Generally, the radio development playwright should note the importance of dialogue in his craft and use it artfully and effectively, for according to Horstman (1988:26):

In radio, the dialogue has to do much more than in any other medium, It has to carry the plot forward, portray the characters. Place them in time and space, provide the props and paint the scenery. It has, too, to convey human emotion-joy and despairs (...)

### **Thought**

Thought is the hallmark of the radio development communication play. Thought is about the idea or lesson presented through a dramatic production. And an development drama performance, on stage or through radio or television, is concerned with communication of thoughts on development. But care must be taken that in the presentation of such thoughts; the dramatic genre is not divested of its pleasurable elements. The process of encasing a development thought in a dramatic form could be likened to the adaptation of a work of art from one genre to another. In it, the peculiarities of the old form gives way, as the adapted work is made to assume or fit itself into the peculiarities of the new form. Although the primacy of the radio theatre development programme is thought- an advocacy for change in development behaviour, the message must be effectively ‘clothed’ in the dramatic form.

The playwright should strive to ensure that the elements of drama and inherently, the ingredients of plot, are present in his play. He needs these attributes of pleasure to effectively cloth or embbed his thought. The radio development play should not be seen as part of the governmental propaganda that adorns the airwaves of many radio stations in the developing countries. A great deal of these programmes are so poorly-conceived and crafted, lacking in dramatic contents but steep in propaganda messages. Little attention is paid to the contrivance of conflict in such slap-dash agit-prop productions. Neither is the dramatic action allowed to develop to a logical conclusion. Rather, there is an easily-observable rush to a resolution that sounds more like a preaching session. A radio theatre development playscript must avoid these pit-falls. The playwright should bear in mind that the project is not merely a drama on radio with development messages, but radio drama for development communication and education. The later entails the adaptation of the thought to meet the demands of the medium. Not only must

the nuances of the radio be recognized and reflected, the ingredients of the dramatic form must be present in the plays.

### **Organisational Strategies**

The radio theatre for development education and communication project could be undertaken by a non-governmental organization, a theatre or development – related department in an institution of higher learning, a radio broadcasting organization in liaison with or through sponsorship with theatre – related or development – related government ministries or departments, development– conscious private and public companies working in collaboration with other bodies. It is not realistic to expect radio broadcast stations, especially in developing countries like Nigeria to successfully embark on such projects on their own. The commercialization psyche which has permeated the broadcast system is capable of scuttling the self - financing of the programmes, leading to their being rested even before the completion of a quarter. But where such programmes are initiated by the radio stations, it would be best to seek for reliable sponsors who are ready to sustain such programmes over time.

**Production:** The facilitating organization could produce the theatre programmes by themselves and later purchase air slots from radio stations for their airing. It could, in the alternative, go into production collaboration with the radio station, having the programmes locally produced by the station, under its close monitoring.

If the organization chooses to produce the theatre programmes on its own, its relationship with the radio broadcast outfit is narrowed – down to a strict commercial one of airtime acquisition. In this case, the entire production process from the research to the post – recording stages of editing and audio sweetening, are entirely borne by it. Where the organization produces the programmes by itself, it has to have within its fold an in-house producer or artistic director who is well-versed in radio broadcast media production. The responsibility of this personnel entails the coordination of the programmes production process. It should also have a development specialist or consultant, whose responsibility would include leading the study and analysis of the development problems of the target area, identifying specific problems to be tackled in each programme and going through the scripts to examine the appropriate representation of the development issues therein. And where the organization depends on the radio establishment for the project's

programmes, there would be the need to have a production committee, the membership of which should include the project leader, the artistic officer of the organization, the organization's development officer or consultant and the producer assigned by the radio organization to handle the production of the programme.

**Choice of location:** After reaching a decision to embark on a radio theatre for development communication project, one of the initial things the organization must do is to identify the area or areas that it would wish to cover. And after a successful identification of the area, the organization would need to identify the radio station or stations that would best suite its purpose. Indeed, this choice would be based on the objectives of the project and the operational framework set by the organization. A station with a wide coverage might not really be the worry of the organization if the project is aimed at specific communities confined to a compact geographical location. But if its desire is to reach as wide an area as possible, then a station with good transmission coverage would be ideal. In some developing countries, some areas have both the Amplitude Modulated (AM) and Frequency Modulated (FM) stations operating side-by-side, and sometimes owned by the same radio organizations. They assign programmes of serious contents to the AM station while musical and light entertainment programmes are put out through the FM stations. The development organization needs to study the audience reception chart of the stations and possibly conduct its own audience survey to ascertain which type of station to employ. (Interestingly, radio theatre as popularly- accepted entertainment programmes can fit into either AM or FM stations). This study is necessary, as the organization needs listeners for its programmes. After all, the essence of every theatre production is that it is meant for consumption by the audience, and in this case, the listeners.

**Development research:** The main reason for the employment of the radio theatre model is because 'the mass media have the ability to reach a much wider audience than theatre for development education programme' (Ewu: 1999:95). The radio theatre for development education programme is therefore meant for an audience wide in scope, heterogeneous in composition and diverse in socio-cultural backgrounds. The research process has to reflect this in its consideration and coverage. For instance, the research could entail the study of the development peculiarities of an entire state, province or district.

The development research stage is a very important stage in the theatre for development communication and education project. Its thorough handling and success, determines the success of the outcome of the entire programme. The facts gathered in the research process, forms the basis for the script .The script is the raw material for the performance, and the performance is the kernel for the discussion stage, and the discussion leads to the action adopted for the much-needed change process. Therefore, the research team should include all the members of the production committee so as to sufficiently acquaint them with the situation to be tackled. The process should reveal the development problems of the area studied, their causes, escalation and effects on the area, the human habits that cause and exacerbate them and the human actions that are needed to remedy or repair the situation.

**Scripting and direction:** The next consideration would be the incorporation of these facts or findings into a radio play. It must be stated here that the duration of the programme would have to be determined by the organizing body. In most cases, radio programme slots could be for 15 minutes, 30 minutes, 45 minutes or 60 minutes. For a development communication and education project. 15 minutes would be too short a time to properly marshal the dramatic action to a plausible resolution. A 30 or 45 minutes programme would be ideal, while a 60 minutes slot would be dramatically stressful to manage. A poor handling of a long slot in terms of a poor artistic crafting of the play, could cause audience snob of the programmes and the eventual failure of the project.

**Casting:** With the script available, the project would then require actors who would then lift the play off the pages of the playtext. The constitution of the cast would depend on the objectivity and artistic thoroughness of the auditioning process. Many radio plays have failed because producers have transferred stage and television auditioning considerations to the radio. As a purely aural medium, the radio has nothing to do with good looks, poise, age and any physical attribute. The radio only employs sound and the vocal suitability of the actor must be the sole determinant for roles in its productions. The ability of the actors to properly pronounce the words associated with development issues is important. It is imperative to state here that the primordial sentiments that have been associated with radio broadcast auditions in many developing countries should not be allowed to encroach

and trivialize the development theatre process. These programmes need be artistically viable to make for believability and reliability.

**Rehearsals:** Since radio theatre programmes do not entail the taking in of lines, the rehearsals do not need many days. Four to five rehearsals would do. But during these, the smooth delivery of the dialogic engagements has to be attained. Development jargons within the playscript have to be properly pronounced to avoid distortions in meaning.

**Recording:** The recording of the production could be done in the recording studios of a radio station or in a private recording studio. The problem with many public radio stations in the developing countries is lack of maintenance and replacement of obsolete equipment. In such a situation, the project organization would have to use private recording studios. The theatre for development and education should be a highly communicative activity. Apart from properly lifting the script from the page, there should be utmost clarity in the production. The muffling of sounds associated with poor recordings in poorly-equipped studios should be avoided; as such muffled sounds constitute noise impediments to understanding. Development behavioural change is normally not a very pleasant experience, especially where the already-held grounds have been deeply – entrenched. And if the understanding of the message of change becomes a stressful experience, the listener's natural reaction is to judge the project unserious, and switch attention to other competing stations and interests within the broadcast intimate spectrum.

For instance, ordinarily, the mention of the environment connotes a feeling of the natural. A recording on the environment needs therefore to convey a feeling of a natural habitat. And a major method of achieving this is in the use of actualities through sound effects which give the semblance of reality. It is one of the essential ingredients of the radio theatre production. In the usage of sound effects; care must be taken to ensure that the recorded effects fit appropriately to the natural situations they are meant to represent. It would be confusing if the sound effect of a burning bush is made to sound like the evening or morning chirping sounds of insects in a local community. If the effects are obtained from already - recorded sound effect albums, they must be tested to ascertain their local appropriateness to the expected situations. If they are locally - recorded, clarity should be ensured, as muffled sound

effects constitute noise and can affect the smooth grasping of meaning as well as believability.

**Editing:** After recording, the programme, professionally, has to go through the process of editing. During this process, sounds that are not needed in the final product are cut off. The important point to note here is that anything that would distort the message of the play and thereby jeopardize the development project should not make the final product. Thus, the organizers have to critically listen to the final tape, and evaluate it within the framework of the project's objectives.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has treated the basis for the utilization of radio theatre in the development communication process. An x-ray of the radio medium and how it could be utilized in the development process, has been undertaken. It has also established that although the medium makes little or no provision for feedback, it has, through its relative low cost of operation, permeability and simplicity, become a popular medium, even in the rural areas of developing countries. The paper has moreover, suggested playcreational and organizational strategies that could take the medium from the parochial role of mere parodying of governmental views, to that engendering real development.

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