BROADCASTING, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA AND THE PRIMACY OF THE SOFTWARE

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Abstract

The issue with Nigeria today is not just development but that which endures over time with its consequential benefits for Nigerians individually and the nation as a whole. For this to be achieved, there must be strategic planning that incorporates the potentials in all sectors in the nation's life, including broadcasting. Thus, this paper holds that the software of broadcasting – the content – can be used to mobilise and harness the different potentials in the country to participate in national development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It argues that in broadcasting, content is king; it is paramount in energising the people and creating the capacity among the citizens to engage in activities which can ensure sustainable development. It is recommended that for this to be achieved, programmers should create programmes whose contents target meeting the development imperatives of the nation to ensure a prosperous and environmentally conscious future.

Introduction

From the earliest of times, the society has been interconnected and interdependent. Occurrences, actions, inactions and decisions in one sector have always seriously impacted on other sectors. This is true of development: the decision or indecision in a sector or occurrences – man-made and natural – can and do bring concerns (and some times overbearing impact) on other sectors of the society. And given that development is the outcome of conscious decisions, it is safe to say that it is the totality of the conscious decisions and actions of different players in the polity that brings about development. According to Byju (2024), "Development is a process that creates growth, brings in progress and positive change. Development is a healthy sign. It is healthy because development ushers in a reasonable measure of wellbeing into the society. Yet, development is not a haphazard process. It is change that is ordered, a process concerned with the people's capacity to induce and manage change. That is, to predict, plan, understand and monitor change and reduce or eliminate unwanted change (Udoakah, 1998).

The foregoing suggests that a condition precedent for development is diligent attention to the process which leads to it. The diligence involves visualizing the development end, and then planning and putting in place the steps (actions) that will ultimately deliver the manifestations of development. An important allusion by Udoakah is that change must be monitored to ensure that what has been achieved is not derailed through change that is not desirable – change that is unwanted. Development that is desirable is positive change, change that creates growth and brings progress to the society. For a country to achieve development, it must have the capacity to cause and create growth to raise the standard of

living of its residents through the provision of basic livelihood requirements (Byju, 2024). He explains national development as encompassing all facets of an individual's life and the life of a nation: "It encompasses the whole growth as well as the expansion of our societal, religious and cultural institutions as well as our agricultural and manufacturing sectors …. The term 'national development' refers to the improvement of a country in all areas, including the political, economic, social, cultural, scientific and material spheres" (Byju, 2024). National development takes a holistic approach to a problem, and involves both the reconstruction and development of numerous aspects of a nation as well as the development of individuals.

It is already stated that the quest for development should be planned and ordered. This does not only ensure that unwanted change does not take place; it ensures that the development is sustainable. In the quest for development, some heavy price is often inadvertently paid, particularly in the form of land degradation, soil erosion, air and water pollution, deforestation, resettlement etc. to the extent that the damage may outweigh the immediate advantages of having more quality output of goods and services. Therefore, development should be sustainable, defined as "an approach to the economic development of a country without compromising with the quality of the environment for future generations". Development that is sustainable minimizes environmental problems; meets the needs of the existing generation without compromising with the quality of the environment for future generations (United Nations, 2024).

Development that is sustainable is an outcome of many individual and collective actions in the different sectors of the polity. One of such sectors is broadcasting, which is here explained as the use of the electromagnetic waves through the electromagnetic spectrum to send information to a mass, dispersed, heterogeneous audience through the media of radio and television. Radio and television, as channels of information dissemination, are central to the communication process of the society. Since their inception in Nigeria, radio (1932) and television (1959) have taken up a commanding position in the information dissemination space in Nigeria. They have, with consistency, brought to our attention frame the daily intelligence which is always outside our individual purview, and have effectively played the mediation role - standing between the news makers and the audience. The characteristics – or peculiarities of the medium of broadcasting – have made broadcasting the medium for all. That they overcome the barriers of language as well as physical and natural barriers – even man-made barriers (Head, 1985) – have made radio and television primary channels of communication among Nigerians. The combination of audio, text, graphics and video gives television an immeasurable advantage that no other medium has been able to enjoy or offer.

It is important to note that broadcast signals penetrate the homes of the audience in such a way that no other medium does. Above all, broadcasting caters for all categories of persons during a day's broadcast through programming that meets the different needs of different audience members. Programming, as defined by Eastman and Ferguson (2009, p. 2), "is the act of choosing and scheduling programs on a broadcast station, a subscription channel, the web or portable devices... The processes of selecting, scheduling, promoting and evaluating programs…" The programmes contain what is known as the "software" – the "content" – which is the ultimate product of broadcasting. In the business of broadcasting, it is the software – the content – which gives the "hardware" – the equipment – the reason to be.

Members of the audience are not in the least interested in whatever equipment a station is able to accumulate. The audience are interested in the content which a station is able to feed into the homes of the audience. While the hardware would enable or enhance the delivery of the software, with high fidelity, it is the software that attracts and sustains the audience. And without the software the hardware has no reason for existence. Put differently, the software gives the hardware the reason for existence (Eastman and Ferguson, 2009). Therefore the software – the content of programmes – has the primacy of place in contributing to sustainable development in Nigeria.

The Concept of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is an extension of development. It is concerned with how the present generation should live their lives in such a way that the lives of future generations are not jeopardised. According to the United Nations (2024): "Sustainable development is how we must live today if we want a better tomorrow, by meeting present needs without compromising the chances of future generations to meet their needs". This is because the survival of the present societies which belong to the planet shared by all depends on a sustainable world. The United Nations (2004) further opines that: "Where development is sustainable, everyone has access to decent work, quality health care and education. National resource use avoids pollution and permanent losses to the environment. Public policy choices ensure that no one is left behind due to disadvantages or discrimination".

Sustainable development is altruistic – the wellbeing of future generations is taken into consideration in the actions, behaviours and attitudes of the present generation. Thus, for there to be sustainable development, the present generation should pursue and balance immediate rewards with possible harms to the planet and future generations. Short-term goals should not override or overshadow long term interests. United Nations Member States, in 2015, after reviewing the implementation and subsequent achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), translated their vision of sustainable development into a blueprint for achieving the goal. They provided 17 Sustainable Development Goals – with ambitious targets to be attained by 2030. The 17 goals are spread across three facets of sustainable development, namely the economy, social development, and the environment.

The pursuit of the attainment of the 17 SDGs by 2030 is not without global challenges, including, but not limited to, the climate change crisis; weak global economy in which just a few countries are living comfortably while many others are sinking into or have already attained poverty level; armed conflicts around the world; and the lingering impact of COVID-19 which has stultified economic and social recovery in many a country. The United Nations is optimistic despite the teething problems listed above. According to the UN SDGs Report 2023: Special Edition, "It is not too late to reset efforts to reach them (the SDGs), however. To advance the sustainable development agenda, governments are integrating the Goals into national plans. However, a fundamental shift is needed to put the world on a better path. And with seven years left to achieve the 2030 Agenda, it is needed now".

The United Nations, wholly and through its organs, holds a periodic review of the sustainable development race towards 2030. For example, the SDG Summit, held at the headquarters of the United Nations in New York, United States of America, was a defining moment for world leaders to renew their commitments to the cause of SDGs, and deliver on their past promises. The summit was a rare opportunity for world leaders to engage in conversations on sustainable development, review progress and gaps in achieving the SDGs as well as "provide high-level political guidance on transformative, accelerated actions to

reach the goals by their 2030 endpoint" (United Nations, 2023). It is important that governments set policies and frameworks to drive sustainable development. Every sector, both public and private, should be involved. This being so, broadcasting, as a major vehicle in development, has a role to play in the attainment of sustainable development. This can be achieved through broadcasting's exercise of its normative functions. The normative functions find expression in the contents of broadcasting – the software – that   are creatively designed to contribute to national development and by extension sustainable development.

The Concept of Software
As we have noted earlier, software in broadcasting refers to the content of broadcasting. It is the engine of broadcasting. It is what a station uses to showcase itself to the audience, and, more importantly, the advertisers. It is content –the quality, quantity and variety – that distinguishes one broadcast station from another, and even makes a station an award-winner among other stations. It is content that is used to satisfy the needs of the audience.

What draws an audience to a station is the content that it provides. In today's hypercompetitive world of broadcasting (Emwinromwankhoe and Akpan, 2022), what appeals to viewers or listeners or online users? Eastman and Ferguson (2009, p.6) provide the answer: "Quite simply, audiences want to be entertained, and they want to be informed. Speaking very generally, these two elements comprise the whole of programming content". It is in the content of different programmes (or individual shows) that the wants and needs of the audiences are addressed and satisfied. As Akpan (2018, p.199) has aptly noted, "The primary pre-occupation of radio and television is to provide information and entertainment from across the world, and at the speed of light. They do this with the assumption that the messages they disseminate are being watched or listened to, and that the audience actually prefer or like such messages which come by way of programmes or shows".

Interestingly, it is the software that broadcast stations use to target the advertisers. It should be noted that radio and television stations are in business to make profit, which comes mostly from revenue from patronage by advertisers. A media outlet will become financially self-sufficient or profitable only if it attracts an audience desired by advertisers. This can only be achieved through content delivered to the audience. Akpan (2023) takes the point further by stating that broadcast stations are not working for the audiences but the advertisers by creating programmes that will attract the audience for the station for advertisers to do business with them. Of course, advertisers want to reach the highest number of potential consumers at a minimum cost.

It needs be emphasised that despite all the technology at the disposal of the audience to choose programmes from a variety of sources, the audience typically expect the broadcaster to do the programming chore. Hence, Eastman and Ferguson (2009, p.3) emphasise that "viewers tend to choose channels, but expect someone else to have filled those channels in an expected way". Akpan (2018, p.208) explains that "the expected way is both the contents and the time that such contents are placed before the audience …. To have good contents costs money, but bad ones are produced at a cost too. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that money be spent wisely – on contents that meet the tastes and needs of the target audience – especially as broadcasters are not in the business of merely creating programmes, but are in the business of creating audience, through programmes that advertisers want to reach". This underscores why Eastman and Ferguson (2009, p.2) state unequivocally: "In the media world, programming is the software that gives the

hardware a reason for existing. Both are necessary for the system to work, but without programming no broadcast or wired services would exist. Programmers sincerely believe that 'content is king'". From the discourse so far, it can be established that the software has primacy regarding the attainment of the goals of broadcasting. Contents should be such that can maximize an audience. Owuamalam (2008) argues that content guarantees the viability or prosperity of any broadcast station. Akpan (2018, p.208) elaborates on this:

> The only way to achieve this goal is to satisfy the needs and wants of the audience through programming – i.e. through contents in the first instance and through type of contents selected for airing at a particular time, through the way the contents are promoted and through a periodic evaluation of such contents *vis-à-vis* the audience. Thus, stations whose programmes are weak – i.e. contents do not appeal to the audiences – stand the chance of going under because stations typically seek large audiences for their advertisers.

In these circumstances, the stations must re-invent themselves with new programmes that appeal to their audiences more than the old contents did. Emwinromwankhoe and Akpan (2022), remark that broadcast organisations achieve competitive advantage by providing their customers with what they want or need, better or even more effective than their competitors and in ways which competitors find difficult to imitate. Competition in broadcasting, many a time, translates into creativity in content. Emwinromwankhoe and Akpan (2022, p. 36-37) highlight four strategies woven in the formular AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire and Action) developed by an American, E. St. Elmo Lewis. The content should arouse or capture the attention of the audience. Of course, as Akpan and Senam (2012, p.102) have said: "If the content does not attract attention, then it is not worth it. Attention motivates interest. Hence, content should sustain the interest of the audience whose attention has been grabbed. How sad if the attention captured cannot be turned into sustained interest". Such interest should push the audience to desire the programme. And then the content should lead the audience into the action envisaged by the content creator. While quality content needs innovation and - creativity, which are not products of happenstance but require hard work, discipline and patience –content creators should think outside the box. Emwinromwankhoe and Akpan (2022) give three imperatives for quality content creation, namely:

1. Content must be interactive: The audience should have opportunity to engage with the TV or radio programmes in real-time, beyond the traditional passive viewing or listening experience.
2. Content must be multimedia in nature: Content should incorporate multiple forms of media such as audio, video, text, images, graphics and interactive elements.
3. Content must be easily accessible: This means that broadcast content can be easily understood, navigated and consumed by a diverse range of audiences, including those with disabilities, language barriers or technical limitations.

Theoretical Framework
This work is anchored on the Development Media Theory propounded by Denis McQuail in 1987. This theory was formulated to suit the needs of developing countries; that the media should attend to the most pressing need of the developing countries which is development. The theory canvasses media support for government and its initiatives to bring about socio-

economic development; that the media should be a partner in driving the socio-economic development process. In particular, the theory envisages the use of communication to facilitate social development in developing countries; that the media should exist for nation building, or as a support to national development programmes. Given the state of development in the developing countries, the media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with national established policy. Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2008, p.63) list additional assumptions of the Development Media Theory as follows: "Freedom of the media should be open to economic priorities and development needs of the society… Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedoms in their information gathering and dissemination tasks". The theory holds that the media are partners in progress and are expected to sing the tunes of national integration, unity and progress. The Development Media Theory wholly supports this work which focuses on how broadcast contents can be deployed to drive sustainable development in Nigeria. The theory finds relevance in the fact that the mass media being agents of development can, by their contents, direct the minds of the citizens to issues on sustainable development and provide the motivation for the citizens to actively participate in the process of achieving sustainable development in the society.

The Software and Sustainable Development in Nigeria
The mass media generally are a lens and a mirror. They provide the binoculars through which the world is seen and they also serve as a mirror to reflect the world, as events unfold daily, to the people. The concepts of lens and mirror have been amplified by the fact that the world is gradually becoming media-dependent, a situation in which many, if not most, people in the world depend on the mass media for their daily information needs. As a result of this, many people look up to the media for a cue on how to attend to issues that are daily becoming complex and complicated, and therefore difficult to comprehend, and react to appropriately, particularly on issues bordering on sustainable development. It is on the above grounds that the mass media generally, and the broadcast media in this circumstance, are primed to drive and contribute to sustainable development in Nigeria, given the acceptable fact that the future of the world rests on sustainable development – human development situation in which the needs of the present are met without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. As a result of their centrality in the lives of the people, the broadcast media come in handy to play a pivotal role in the global efforts to attain sustainable development. As it has been previously stated in this work, the broadcast media can contribute to the attainment of sustainable development through their programme content – appropriately called software – that they offer daily to the public in their programming. In what ways can the broadcast media significantly drive sustainable development?

Raising Awareness
Awareness creation is at the core of media duty and obligation to the society. This is the information and surveillance function (McQuail, 2010; Watson and Hill, 2015; Kumar, 2023). Sustainable development on its own could be a complex, difficult-to-understand issue. Yet the broadcast media, through awareness creation, break seemingly complex issues and demands upon both the citizens (individual and corporate) and policy makers into simpler variables and relatable and digestible content for easy comprehension and consequent action. The media have profound impact on the understanding of the environment. Kumar

(2023) underscores this point when he states that: 'It's not just about breaking news or the latest documentary; it's a comprehensive network influencing how we perceive, react to, and engage with environmental issues. In the intricate dance between media and environmental awareness, every article, broadcast and tweet can be a step towards a more informed and pro-active society". The journey to creating awareness starts with the broadcast outfits fulfilling their responsibility to present facts accurately; facts obtained from researched information. As Kumar (2023) further states:

> Investigative reports on environmental degradation, scientific studies on air quality and in-depth analysis of energy consumption patterns – all of these serve as building blocks for public knowledge. They shape our understanding of the world and our place within it…The ripple effect of media coverage can be substantial. A well timed documentary or a viral social media campaign can shift public opinion, spark conversations, and even influence policy decisions. When (the) media put the spotlight on environmental crises, it can catalyze activism, drive donations to conversation groups and pressure government to take action. The power of the press, in this case, extends beyond information it can be a catalyst for change.

Bridge between Policymakers and the Public

The media naturally serve as a bridge (a mediator) between the source and the information-consuming public. Hence, the broadcast media serve as an intermediary, and convey the public's concern to policy makers and, conversely, explain government initiatives to the citizens. This two-way process is vital to ensure that environmental policies reflect the will and the needs of the citizens. Radio and television, broadcasting firsthand the beauty of nature and the stark reality of its destruction, have the ability to evoke emotional responses that can inspire immediate action. In the words of Kumar (2023): "The media can be a formidable ally in the fight for a sustainable future. By continuing to spotlight environmental issues, fostering dialogue, and advocating positive change, the media truly have the power to shape a greener, more conscious world".

Promoting Sustainable Lifestyles

To a great extent, sustainable development rests on the lifestyles that citizens elect for themselves. This is particularly so as the aggregate of individual citizens' actions and inactions impacts heavily on the environment and by extension sustainable development. Therefore, the broadcast media, using the contents of their programmes and through programming, have the power to present to the public the merits and demerits of their actions and inactions, and how they consequently impact on the ecosystem. Much of the action of the citizens derives from culture. Hence, the broadcast media can help to explain cultural norms and values with the use of their content in a way that will focus the audience's attention on the importance of sustainable development and how cultural values can drive sustainable development (Chawla, 2024).

Economic Empowerment

Much of the infraction on the environment is traceable to the relative poverty of citizens who, in the face of economic deprivations, are only focused on and interested in what can keep their lives going, unmindful and disinterested in the consequences of their actions. It is important, therefore, that the drive towards sustainable development should include the

economic empowerment of the citizens to place them on a pedestal that they can take actions that promote sustainable development. Economic empowerment "is the ability to make and act on decisions that involve the control over and allocation of financial resources" (High Impact Practice, 2011). The broadcast media can and do draw the citizens' attention to those activities that are not only economically viable but are also environmentally friendly. It is common knowledge that one of the reasons for the prevalence of poverty in Nigeria is corruption which turns community wealth into a private estate. Thus, as the World Bank (2002) has stated: "The media can expose corruption. They can keep a check on public policy by throwing a spotlight on government action. They let people voice diverse opinions in governance and reform, and help build public consensus to bring about change ."

International Co-operation
In an increasingly interconnected world faced with many complex issues which seem to impinge on the efforts to attain sustainable development, international cooperation holds part of the key to resolving the multifaceted issues. An integral part of that key is the role that the content of the broadcast media plays in setting the agenda for global discussion on international cooperation on addressing sustainable development, particularly in the relatively poor countries such as Nigeria. It is encouraging that, globally, countries have acknowledged the power and necessity of working together. Alajmi (2023) stresses this point: "International cooperation provides an essential framework for addressing global challenges that transcend borders. Issues like climate change, infectious diseases, and terrorism require a collective effort from nations worldwide. Collaborative initiatives such as the Paris Agreement, the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the United Nations (UN) serve as platforms for countries to pool resources, knowledge, and expertise to combat these pressing issues."

It is therefore critical that broadcast stations in Nigeria should use their programmes to emphasise global cooperation in promoting sustainable development. This is more so as sustainable development is a global imperative, and international cooperation is crucial in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Alajmi, 2023). The SDGs encompass various aspects of human wellbeing, from eradicating poverty and hunger to ensuring clean water and affordable energy access. It is essential that broadcast content is used to drive international partnerships towards realising these ambitious goals. In an increasingly interconnected world, nations should be made to recognize and appreciate the fact that the challenges of sustainable development are global in nature and thus require collective solutions. International cooporation is the corner stone of progress.

Community Engagement
According to GRANICUS (2024): "Community engagement is based on the democratic idea that everyone who is affected by an issue that impacts their community should have a say in the decision making around it. It, moreover, holds the promise that public participation can influence decisions that affect the provision of services, future visions and sustainability of our communities". Community engagement is about consultation, participation, collaboration and empowerment, and finds strength in mutual decision making. People, governments and organisations look collaboratively to create – and realize – sustainable visions for their community's future (GRANICUS, 2024).

For broadcast stations, their interactive programming can encourage public debate, foster community engagement and facilitate public participation in sustainable development initiatives. Such programming seeks to engage the community to achieve sustainable outcomes, equitable decision-making processes, and deepen relationships and trust between government organisations and communities. There should be intentional interactions between communities and public decision makers. Through these intentional interactions, community members can –and do – influence policy making. Through the contents of their programmes, broadcast stations provide participants in community engagement with information that they need in order to engage in a meaningful way with policy issues, and communicate, via feedback, how their input affects public decisions on policies regarding sustainable development.

Monitoring Progress

One of the ways that the broadcast media, through their content, can make sustainable development a reality is for them to track and report on sustainable development progress and to hold stakeholders accountable (World Bank, 2002). It is important that change be monitored to prevent unwanted change that can erode the gains that have been achieved in ensuring sustainable development. The tracking and reporting should be periodic to ensure that development goes as planned. When this happens, the progress made towards achieving sustainable development would be enduring.

Final Word

In the light of the interdependency in the world in which activities in one sector may have consequential impact on other sectors, the discourse above has shed some light on and drawn attention to the nexus between mass media content and sustainable development. This in itself demonstrates the fact that the task of achieving sustainable development is multisectoral and therefore demands the involvement of stakeholders in different sectors, including broadcasting. As the discourse above indicates, broadcast stations can, by their contents, be partners in the drive to attain sustainable development. They can raise awareness on the imperative of sustainable development, articulate the issues surrounding it, engage policy makers, drive economic empowerment and promote sustainable lifestyles among the citizens, encourage community engagement and track the level of attainment of sustainable development in the country. The ultimate goal is to assist in enthroning a society in which the present generation is conscious enough to pursue immediate rewards, and in doing so balance same with possible harms to the planet and the future generations. Truly, sustainable development is achievable if all relevant hands are on the deck. Hence, broadcast programmers should create contents that target meeting the development imperatives of the nation to ensure a prosperous and environmentally conscious future.

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