

MEDIA ADVOCACY AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD SECURITY IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

RESEARCH ARTICLE

South-South Nigeria is an economic hub of Nigeria. It is the region that has largest oil and gas deposit that accounts for the growing country's Gross Domestic Products (GDP) and 80 percent of its revenue. The region is however bedeviled by acute shortage of food for the population, forcing it to rely on other geopolitical zones for its daily food needs. The study therefore was undertaken to uncover suitable media platforms for advocacy in the production and sustenance of food security in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Other objectives of the study included to identify media strategies and platforms for possible synergies that would guarantee food sustainability in the region. More so, to ensure media partnership with the government in policy formulation, education and enlightenment on food security as well as mobilize farmers to embrace government policies on agriculture and explore those agriculture business portfolios available to bring about food security in the region. The scope of the study is South-South region covering Akwa Ibom and Cross River States only. To build a solid foundation, the study was laced with agenda setting theory. The population of the study is 10,408325 as projected by the National Population Commission. Adopting the survey method, the sample of the work was 400 using Taro Yamane's formula. The study revealed and concluded that the media as the veritable instruments could play the role of ensuring food security and sustainability in the region, particularly when they are synergized. It recommended the continuous interface of media between the government and the citizen especially as it concerns food security

KEYWORDS: Media, Advocacy, Food Sustainability, Security

INTRODUCTION

The study is basically aimed at using the media to advocate for the sustenance of information to ensure food security in South - South Nigeria. Apart from the global prediction of food shortage arising from conflicts between nations of the world and the change in climate which is identified as a potential may trigger of food crisis, the insecurity in the country has been identified as a key factor that has set the stage for the food crisis situation in Nigeria. The study identifies the media as veritable variable that could play a key role with collaborative efforts of government in ensuring food security in the area in terms of informing, educating

and enlightening policy makers and the public on steps to prevent food insecurity, mitigate food insecurity and ensuring food security.

The media have been identified as playing vital roles in national development. The study has identified the role of media that would ensure food security and sustainable development in Nigeria. Food is essential for the survival of nations. Healthy food means healthy population, healthy population resonates a healthy nation and healthy nation is a wealthy nation (James 2020). Today, the world is faced with food crisis arising basically from conflicts among nations like the one between Russia and Ukraine which are the hubs of barley, wheat, rice and other cereals. In Nigeria for instance, the intra-national conflicts where some parts of Nigeria are generally unsecured have prevented farmers from farming for fear of death or being kidnapped either by terrorist groups or marauding armed herders who go about destroying farms through open grazing.

The trend, according to the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), may cause food crisis situation particularly in the North East. The North Central, North West and the North East are potentially the food baskets of Nigeria where the majority household in the South depend on for basic food needs (Ned 2023).

More so, the climate change which is a global phenomenon has impacted negatively on the global food insecurity. (Ned 2023) Nigeria for instance has recorded desert encroachment of more than a kilometer per annum in the North, forcing farmers and herders to migrate Southward. This adverse climatic condition has caused the drying up of the surface water, streams and ponds and has shrunk the Lake Chad and other sources of water. In the South for instance, Oil spillage and other forms of environmental degradation have no doubt affected the availability of fish, animals and food such that if the steady elevated graph of the trend is not tamed, it might result to a full blown food crisis and humanitarian situation such as hunger, famine, diseases and death. Women and children are predicted by experts to be mostly affected should the situation arise.

The study has identified the mass media as veritable tools that if properly harnessed could navigate Nigeria away from food insecurity route and provide the compass that will reconnect the nation to a super high way that will lead to a desired destination for surplus of food production for domestic consumption and exports. The power of the media cannot be underestimated. According to Udofia (2023), the mass media wield a strong social force in the society. The media set agenda and influence attitude change because it is the catalyst for development. The impact of the media is felt in every circle and the direction of society conversation is championed by the media (Linus 2020). The media's agriculture and or food surplus education and advocacy can actually stimulate actions leading to the right application of technology coupled with strong public policy and programmes on agriculture in ensuring food production in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Of the six geographical zones in Nigeria, the South-South geographical zone is no doubt endowed with natural and human resources. These include but not limited to petroleum, large population, natural gas, rain forest, arable lands, water, favourable climate fairly distributed round the year. The region also has the largest cattle ranch in Obudu and some other places as it. Some residents engage in finishing because the region is surrounded by salt and fresh waters. Yet, the region is facing acute foot deficit and or shortage. For instance, residents in the region import animal skin popularly known as *ikpa or kpomo*, yam, goat, cows, sugar, beverages, garri etc. for domestic use from Northern Nigeria.

Recently, in Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly passed the Bulk Purchase Bill and was signed into law by the governor. The law among other things seeks to import food in bulk and distribute same to indigent residents. This move has confirmed the shortage of food and existence of hunger among the population. This is notwithstanding the fact that the successive and even the current government have laid so much emphasis on agricultural revolution in the State with little or nothing to show. Another angle to it is that residents fear their crops are destroyed by murderer herders and are afraid of possible attacks by armed robbers. Hence, their motivation to engage in agricultural activities is grossly weakened. Furthermore, various media platforms have been deployed in advocacy for food security in the region yet, impacts of such advocacy is grossly marginal. Thus, the thrust of the study is to converge hybrid media, re-strategies media tools compatible and familiar in the region to lead in the advocacy for sustainability of food security in South – South Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to use the media to advocate for sustainable food security in South – South Nigeria. Other objectives include:

- i. to identify media strategies and leverage on same ensuring food security in South – South Nigeria
- ii. to partner governments, in agriculture policy, formulation, education and important on food sustainability in the region using media
- iii. to identify effective media platforms and energize them for sustainable food security in South –South Nigeria
- iv. To partner, mobilize and sensitizing farmers on agric policies and agric business portfolios opportunities particularly food chain production.

Scope of the Study

The study covers South-South Nigeria with particularly Akwa Ibom and Cross River States. Redemption FM Radio, Abak and Cross River Radio Calabar.

Review of Concepts

Media:

Media is the means used in communicating to the heterogeneous and anonymous or complex audience (Linus 2018). They are means of communication. They could be traditional, indigenous, below-the-line, and social media. Sometimes the term “media” is associated with press or communication. Consequently, one cannot actually divorce the press with communication. Hence, the media are a conglomeration of various means of mass communication. (Udofia, 2022).

According to Enahoro (2002), no society can survive without the media. Media maintain and animate life. They are the motor and expression of social activity and civilization. Communication through media leads people and peoples from instinct to inspiration, through variegated process and system of enquiry; command and control.

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), having have a clear understanding of the functions of the media, assigns it with the role of holding government to account. Sections 22 provides *interlia*: “the press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter, and uphold the responsibility and accountability of Government to the people”.

McLuhan cited in Folarin (2002) argues that media of communication are vast social metaphors that not only transmit information but determine what is knowledge that not only orient us to the world, but tells us what kind of world exist, that not only excite and delight our sense, but by altering the ratio of sensory equipment which we use to actually exchange our character.

All humans for instance stand symbiotically related to the media. The media in fact extend the sensory capacities of man. Furthermore, media also influence man's perceptual sensibilities which also influence man's picture of reality (Enahoro 2002).

Food Security:

For the purpose of this study, it is pertinent that the concept of security is unveiled so as to appreciate it from the prism of food security. There are basically different schools of thought on the concept of security. The realists see security as a threat to nation's peace principally arising from outside the nation's border either by non-state or state groups (Galadima 2008). The assumption of the realists' conceptualization of security is summed by Walter Lippmann cited in Barry (1991, p 12), "a nation is secured to the extent to which it is not in danger having to sacrifice its core values, if it wishes to avoid war, and is able, if challenged, to maintain them (core values) by victory in such a war". To the realists, security only concern with the ability of a state to deter or defeat external attacks primarily of military nature. This is the traditional concept of security and it is basically has to do with the developed world.

Another twist or angle of security is the idealists' standpoint which expands the concept of security from the frontiers of state-centric to include social and environmental centric (Ned 2023). To them, the end of the Second World War (WWII) and that of the cold war has put an end to external military threat to countries though the world still records military incursion in Iraq, Iran, Ukraine, Russia etc. The idealists, mainly from the developing economy or third world nations argue that the biggest threat to security is hunger, disease, ignorance, poverty, environmental threat such as global warming, environmental degradation etc.

It is within the spectrum of the idealists' prism on security that food security features. Food security therefore is nations or peoples having enough to feed its population rightly, timely and efficiently (Klaireet *al.*, 1994). There are basically six classes of food which should be proportionately made available to the teeming population and ensure the nation has the reserve such that would not be affected it in the face of global crisis, war or threat within and without (Ayoob1991).

Development/ Sustainable Development

The concept of development has so many explanations to different scholars, individuals and nations. In a simple sense, it could be linked to positive growth or improvement over the status quo of any given situation. Arnold (2001, p.45) sees development as "a comprehensive phenomenon of all branches of the economy as well as social services and other infrastructures which must be taken forward in par with each other". This means equal distribution of resources to all sectors and whole there is disequilibrium in resources allocation, there is no development.

From the capitalists' point of view, development according to Leys (1997) in his postulation on Rise and Fall of Development is when the nations embark on industrialization and large scale production of goods and services. This calls for improve in science and technology, the

use of machines and mechanization and or artificial intelligence and the transformation of raw material to finished good.

The socialist or Marxist concept of development differs significantly from that of the capitalist's concept. To the Marxists school of thought, development is seen from the social aspect. According to the school of thought, there must be a change in both quality and quantity of the standard of living of the people. In this case, the factors of production should be controlled by the public not individual. Moris (2011) explains that development goes beyond simply looking at how production an economy is, to consider how that the monetary wealth is used and how it affects the social structure.

Firstly, Moris developed what he termed as physical quality of life Index (PQLI) to measure life expectancy, infant mortality and adult education. The index is basically on results rather than the amount spent on achieving them. Secondly, the human development index (HDI) was devised by the United Nations to consider life expectancy, educational attainment and satisfaction derived from income. The UN also reeled out about seventeen sustainable development goals (SDGS) to push for anf mirror development.

According to Tadaro and Smith (2004), development must have at least the following key objectives: to increase the availability and widen the distribution of basic life – sustaining goods. Secondly, to raise levels of living and provision of more jobs, better education and greater attention to cultural and human values. Finally, development also aims at expanding the spectrum and range of economic and social choices available to individuals and nations.

According to the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), sustainable economic development refers to the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In its report of “Our Common Future”, the Commission noted the following seven critical objectives for any sustainable development policy:

- i. Reviving growth.
- ii. Changing the quality of growth with more emphasis on development than growth.
- iii. Meeting essential needs of people for jobs, foods, energy, water and sanitation.
- iv. Ensuring a sustainable level of population.
- v. Conserving and enhancing the resource base.
- vi. Reorienting technology and managing risk and
- vii. Merging environment and economy in decision making.

Research Methodology

The study is adopted survey of Akwa Ibom and Cross River States, South - South Nigeria as its spectrum. The study areas are carefully selected because both have something in common in terms of culture, landscape and proximity. While Cross River State seems to have vast lands, forests and good climate for sufficient food production, Akwa Ibom State basically depends on the former for some essential commodities such as yam, cassava, rice etc. Akwa Ibom State in the other hand has water which can trigger the blue economy, good climate and land for agricultural purposes yet depends on the northern and neighboring states to feed its population due to population explosion in one hand and the dependency of some indigenous food needs by the neighbouring states of Rivers, Abia and Lagos on the other hand.

The Cross River Basin Authority (CRBA) – an agriculture agency that covers both states was interfaced with in order to get input and responses particularly on policy programmes and direction in agriculture.

The researcher shall reach out to major banks such as the Banks of Agriculture, Federal Mortgage Bank, Akwa Savings Limited now Ibom Mortgage Bank and its Cross River State counterpart shall be visited to get statistics to ascertain some packages and or products for farmers as well as interest on loans. Ministry of Agriculture, both at the federal, state and Local Government levels were contacted for inputs. Investment departments and agencies such as Akwa Ibom Investment Company, Cross River State Investment and Property Limited, Water Boards were also approached to glean various responses and inputs on the study. Finally, select farmers were visited for special interviews that aided the study.

Similarly, indigenous media and tools were deployed to communicate to both respondents and the larger population on a time most appropriate. Traditional and religious institutions which possess enormous influences on the population particularly at the community levels were co-opted into the study for more depth.

Description of the Study Area

Akwa Ibom and Cross River States could be succinctly described as the different ears of the same horse. Both were under Cross River State before Akwa Ibom was created in 23 September, 1986. While Cross River State still maintains its name.

They are typically the states in the South – South region of Nigeria bound with Ebonyi, Abia, Rivers states on the west, Atlantic Ocean on the south, Cameroon on the East and Benue State on the north.

The area has tropical rain forests, fresh waters, mountains, green vegetation, salt and fresh waters. The combined population of the area is estimated at 10,408,325 (www.nigeriastatepopulation.com). Residents are basically farmers, fishers and craftsmen and women.

Population of the Study

The projected population of Cross River and Akwa Ibom States is 4,406,200 and 4,979,400 respectfully giving the total of 9,385,600. The study population is estimated at 10,408,325 from 18 years and above (www.nigeriastatepopulation.com). This range of population is carefully selected because it is an active population that engages in agriculture.

Sample Size and Procedure of the Study

The sample size of the study is 400, derived from the Taro Yamane's formula thus:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where n = Sample size sought

N = population (10408325)

I = constant

e = Level of confidence (0.05)

$$\frac{10408325}{1 + 10408325 \times (0.05)^2}$$

$$\frac{10408325}{10408326 \times (0.0025)}$$

$$\frac{10408325}{26020}$$

= 400

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument adopted for data collection would be the questionnaire using purposive sampling technique. The questionnaire was administered on respondents.

Four research assistants were deployed in each of the states to assist in administering and retrieving the questionnaire from the respondents. Consequently, data were collected and collated, processed and presented on table for analysis. The opinion with the highest degree was considered the opinion of the majority. Researchers worked on 384 questionnaire that were found useful. 16 suffered fatality.

The researchers also deployed local radio, newspapers, town criers, town hall meetings to communicate results to the entire population then followed by agriculture education on the media where the research were provided, with resources experts each of the states in this regard using community radio.

Theoretical Framework

The study is effectively laced and framed with the Agenda setting Theory. The theory was developed by Max McCombs and Donald Shaw. The theory states that the media may not tell us what to think but media may tell us what to think about. They observed that the public agenda and discussion and basically shaped by the media. This is achieved in choosing and displaying news. According, editors, newsroom staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping socio-economic and political realities through advocacy, persuasion, information, education and agenda setting.

This theory has an imperative to the study. It strongly believes that media are effective instruments of advocacy, education, enlightenment and information for the advancement of sustainable food security in South – South Nigeria.

Emperical Review of Studies

Isika, G. U. (2015). Impact of radio on dry farming: a study of “the farmer:, a media advocacy programme on delta broadcasting service, Asaba.

The study aimed at assessing the impact of radio programme “the farmers” on the dry season farming in Delta State. The radio programme is basically participating through phone-in strategy in vernacular *ka anyi je ugbo* (let’s go farming).

Findings revealed that 47.3 percent respondents who listened the programme regularly attested of the benefits of the radio programme while 52.7 percent did not see the need of the

programme. The study concluded that the programme failed due to timing because farmers leave for farms very early and return late.

Another was that the greater majority of the farmers do not possess radio set/receiver. Again, Delta State is multi-lingual, so, producing an important programme in one local language is counterproductive particularly because the locals do not outgrow ethnicity and tribalism menace. It recommended government to give incentives to farmers to ensure dry season food production in Delta State.

Data Presentation and Analysis

		RESPONSES			
		EFFECTIVE		INEFFECTIVE	
S/N	ITEMS	Responses	Percentage (%)	Responses	Percentage (%)
1.	Town Hall Meeting	372	96.6	12	3.1
2.	Social Media Platform	86	22.4	298	77.6
3.	Town Crying Medium	302	78.6	72	18.8
4.	Religious Platform	198	51.6	186	48.4
5.	Traditional Rulers	206	53.6	178	46.4
6.	Use of community Radio	333	86.7	51	13.3
7.	Use of Newspapers	64	16.7	320	83.3
8.	Use of Television	48	12.5	336	87.5
9.	Use of Bill Boards	96	25	288	75

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The table above shows responses on the media and strategies that are best suitable and applicable for the people government of the study area to develop in advocacy and sustenance of good security. Responses from Town Hall meeting strategy, town crier platform, religion medium, the use of traditional rulers and the use of community radio shows higher responses and percentage.

Further investigations revealed that people are more receptive and expensive to the use of indigenous communication which is what played out on the table above. On the use of the radio for advocacy, further response revealed that the use of radio has become part of the community daily lifestyle particularly so since the radio is an interactive medium and always combines the use of English pidgin and local languages

Invariably, utilization of social media platforms was significantly appreciated but it challenges punched on the fact that the majority of the population could not afford Android phones and other ICT gadget to deploy in the communication of agriculture for sustainable

food security in the study area. Similar services played out on the use of newspapers, similarly, low responses were recorded on the use of newspapers, television and billboards in the advocacy of agriculture and sustainable food security in the region. It has been revealed that newspapers only circulate in the urban centers, leaving the rural centers which form the chance of the majority without newspapers. This was traceable to high level of illiteracy as well as poverty recorded in the rural community that made it very difficult to patronize newspapers in the grassroots level. Level of electricity infrastructure was attributed to the use of Tv for food sustainable advocacy in the study area. Majority of Respondents said their communities were without electricity, hence, the utilization of Tv becomes utopian.

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