



Role of Radio in Promoting the Sustainable Development Goals among Residents of Ohaji-Egbema LGA, Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a globally recognised agenda aimed at achieving an equitable society through sustainable development initiatives outlined under 17 key objectives. This study examines the role of mass media in promoting these SDGs among residents of Ohaji-Egbema in Imo State, Nigeria. A survey design was employed, with a sample size of 385 drawn from the population of Ohaji-Egbema LGA, estimated at 254,200. The study utilised the respondent-driven sampling (RDS) chain referral technique to select participants. Findings indicate that, on average, 75% of respondents demonstrated high levels of radio listenership and awareness of the SDGs. Radio awareness programmes were found to positively influence respondents' willingness to engage in SDG-related activities within their communities. However, the study also revealed that both the Imo State and Nigerian governments are unlikely to meet the United Nations' SDG targets by 2030. The study concludes that while radio has played a significant role in promoting the SDGs in the state, the efforts of the Imo State and Nigerian governments have been insufficient to realise the goals. It is therefore recommended that both governments not only ratify international treaties but also commit actively to achieving the set targets within the stipulated timeframe, in order to align Nigeria with other nations in terms of sustainable development.

Keywords: Radio, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Rural Development, Imo State, Nigeria

Introduction

The quest to bridge the wide gap between the rich and the poor has led several global organisations to initiate programmes aimed at achieving a fair and equitable world. One such effort was the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the United Nations Organisation, which, upon expiration, evolved into the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to the United Nations (2017), "Nigeria was among the one hundred and eighty-nine (189) countries from across the globe that embraced and endorsed the United Nations Millennium Declaration in New York, September 2000, which comprised eight (8) goals, eighteen (18) time-bound targets, and forty-eight

(48) quantitative indicators.” Akinyooye and Aransi (2020) state that “the following goals were enshrined in this document: ending severe poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; empowering women and promoting gender equality; decreasing child mortality rates; improving maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; sustaining the environment; and lastly, establishing a worldwide alliance for development.”

In collaboration with the heads of 93 member states and governments, the United Nations set the SDGs as a new development agenda to foster progress among member countries as the timeline for implementing the MDGs approached its conclusion. This agenda, commonly known as *Agenda 2030*, includes 230 indicators, 169 targets, and 17 goals. The development agenda presents these objectives in a hierarchical framework for conceptualisation and prioritisation, which includes: “ending poverty, ensuring good health, access to quality education, achieving gender equality, access to clean water and sanitation, access to affordable and modern energy, encouraging decent work and economic growth, fostering innovation and infrastructure in industry, reducing inequalities within and among nations, creating sustainable cities and communities, promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns, addressing adverse climate actions, protecting life on land and in the water, promoting peace, justice, and strong institutions, and lastly, strengthening international partnerships” (International Union, 2017). Achieving these novel objectives requires effective public engagement and enlightenment. This is especially important for residents of rural communities, who often face various forms of deprivation and are, therefore, key stakeholders in the implementation of these goals. It is thus crucial to investigate their level of awareness and the extent to which government policies directed at achieving the SDGs affect them.

The mass media have been instrumental in creating public awareness. Anyanwu et al. (2019) observed that the mass media play a crucial role in national development as they influence and shape public opinion, behaviour, and attitudes. In rural communication, no mass medium is as effective as radio in disseminating information about government programmes, policies, and projects beneficial to rural dwellers. Radio, therefore, holds the potential to influence and shape public opinion, behaviour, and attitudes, and to drive mass participation in development efforts.

Given this potential and the significance of the SDGs to rural populations, it is expected that the media particularly radio broadcast stations should deploy their resources to promote awareness and encourage participation in the actualisation of these goals within rural communities in Imo State and beyond. Several studies have been conducted on the role of the media in driving awareness and participation towards achieving the SDGs (Akinyooye & Aransi, 2020; Nefi, 2018; Christopher & Emmanuel, 2021; Uwaoma, Ugwueze & Nkechinyere, 2020). However, there is a gap in research specifically examining the role of radio in promoting awareness and participation in rural communities in Imo State, Nigeria, concerning the actualisation of the SDGs. If radio stations in Imo State are not effectively performing this role, it could slow down implementation, progress, and mass participation in achieving the SDGs. It is based on this observed gap that the researchers embarked on this study.

Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to investigate the role of radio in promoting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among residents of Ohaji-Egbema LGA, Imo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the level of radio awareness of the SDGs among residents of Ohaji-Egbema LGA, Imo State, Nigeria.

2. Evaluate the extent to which radio awareness of SDG objectives influences mass participation in sustainable development programmes among residents of Ohaji-Egbema LGA, Imo State, Nigeria.
3. Examine the perception of residents of Ohaji-Egbema LGA, Imo State, Nigeria regarding the attainment of the SDGs in Nigeria by 2030.

Literature Review

The Role of Radio in National Development

The role of radio in advancing developmental programmes in rural communities cannot be overlooked by any government, agency, or institution committed to bridging the development gap between rural and urban areas. Apuke (2014) asserts that one of the most significant communication channels for rural mobilisation is radio. Through radio, people can communicate with anyone in the world by transmitting spoken words, music, and other signals through the atmosphere. Today, radio programmes often include advertisements, music, news, interviews, and coverage of sporting events. Radio's unique characteristics have enabled it to maintain its prominence and relevance among media consumers, particularly in mass mobilisation for developmental initiatives. According to the Gibraltar Regulatory Authority (n.d.), radio is essential not only for receiving emergency alerts and communication during crises but also as a platform for regular community messaging and events such as local sports, special programmes, and business advertising, especially in small towns like Gibraltar. They affirm further that "radio has proved its worth in times of emergency such as when access to the mobile network is down as a result of an overload, or phone lines are cut. Even when there is no electricity, most radio sets can be battery-operated or hand-cranked."

Anaeto and Anaeto, cited in Asemah, Nkwam-Uwaoma, and Tsegys (2020), opine that community radio promotes development by sensitising, conscientising, and mobilising community members toward developmental objectives. This implies that radio plays a vital role in achieving the developmental goals of rural areas. They further emphasise that radio, by its nature, is the ideal medium for development communication in Africa. By implication, radio should be at the forefront of championing development especially the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) initiative of the United Nations.

Sustainable Development Goals

Many scholars have presented various perspectives on the concept of sustainable development. It is broadly understood as "an approach to development that allows nations to meet their present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations Report on Sustainable Development Goals, 2017). Nwosu (2007) aligns with this definition, asserting that a sustainable development system operates in equilibrium, either in a steady state or undergoing changes at a carefully regulated pace, acceptable to and beneficial for the people it serves. Nwabueze (2011, p.35) describes sustainable development as "the totality of development plans, projects, programmes, and policies being able to endure for a long time, i.e., to be of benefit to today's and tomorrow's generations." The United Nations, cited in Akinyooye and Aransi (2020), notes that Nigeria was among the 189 countries that embraced the United Nations Millennium Declaration in September 2000 in New York. This declaration comprised eight goals, eighteen time-bound targets, and forty-eight quantitative indicators.

Nigeria was not among the nations that performed impressively on the MDGs. If this trend of ratifying international treaties without fulfilling the obligations continues, Nigeria may again fall short of meeting the threshold for the SDGs. Nefi (2018) argues that for the media to contribute meaningfully to the realisation of the SDGs, they must operate in an enabling environment that allows them to participate in the implementation, reporting, and monitoring of SDG-related programmes. To

do this effectively, the media must also be equipped with relevant skills. He further states that the key drivers for achieving the SDGs include access to information, access to justice, capable institutions, transparency and accountability, peace and security, an informed media, and the support of civil society.

Both the Nigerian and Imo State governments have introduced several programmes aimed at achieving the SDGs such as the Conditional Cash Transfer, TraderMoni, Solar Borehole Water Projects, and Universal Basic Education. However, doubts persist as to whether grassroots communities are adequately informed, educated, and encouraged by the mass media to participate in these life-changing programmes.

Empirical Review

Prior studies related to the current study exist. Akinyooye and Aransi (2020) investigated the impact of mass media on the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal One in Osun State, Nigeria. Their study aimed to assess how the media contributed to creating awareness of SDG One in the state. Their findings indicated that mass media significantly facilitated awareness of numerous developmental programmes within the communities studied. Furthermore, increased awareness encouraged community stakeholders to support poverty-related initiatives. However, while media awareness was a necessary condition, it was not sufficient on its own to achieve the poverty targets of SDG One. The study also revealed gender disparities in awareness and participation, with women showing greater awareness and men being more involved in implementation. Recommendations included consistent dissemination of basic literacy programmes integrated with poverty alleviation messages, mobilisation of essential resources, ongoing project monitoring, and active community involvement.

Also, Nefi (2018), using a desk research approach, analysed available secondary data. The study demonstrated that conventional media serve as platforms for debates and discussions involving experts, institutions, and the public. Traditional media also have the unique capacity to engage grassroots populations in Nigeria. According to Nefi, the success of the SDGs is closely tied to effective communication strategies for engaging the public. Doi, Osawa, and Tsutsumida (2022) examined the effects of global lockdowns on human mobility and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) emissions using air pollution indices, datasets, and satellite imagery. They explored how lockdowns affected progress towards the SDGs both during and after the pandemic. Their data showed significant reductions in human mobility and NO₂ emissions, indicating immediate and long-term impacts on multiple SDGs. They identified four goals that were negatively affected and others positively impacted, particularly those related to economics and environmental preservation. Their findings shed light on the status of the SDGs before, during, and after the COVID-19 lockdown, and how the pandemic influenced global progress towards these goals.

Furthermore, Emmanuel and Christopher (2021) studied media Agenda-Setting, clarity, and community engagement in support of SDG achievement in Benue. The research examined the media's role in setting development priorities and how this influenced public awareness and support for the SDGs in Benue State. The study was grounded in development media theory, media dependency theory, and agenda-setting theory. Using a survey design, data were collected from 384 residents through questionnaires. Findings revealed that only a small percentage of the population was aware of SDGs 7–17 through mainstream media. Most attention was given to SDGs 1–5. Consequently, the researchers recommended the adoption of a strategic media approach to reach target audiences, enhance awareness, and mobilise participation. They also emphasised the importance of translating SDG messages into local languages to improve rural outreach.

While Emmanuel and Christopher's (2021) study shares similarities with the present research in the area of media-driven awareness creation, the key difference is geographical. Their study was conducted in Benue State, whereas the present study focuses on Imo State—allowing for comparative analysis of SDG awareness across Nigeria's geopolitical zones. Additionally, Akinyooye and Aransi (2020) focused solely on SDG One, whereas the current study considers the broader role of radio in promoting awareness of all 17 SDGs. Lastly, Nefi's (2018) findings, although relevant, were based on secondary data and lack empirical validation.

Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored on the development media theory. The theory was conceptualised by McQuail in 1987 to explain the normative roles of the press in countries typically categorised as developing. Asemah et al. (2017, p. 55) assert that "The fundamental premise underlying the origin of this theory is that development is impossible without communication." According to development communication theory also known as development support communication the media assumes responsibility for implementing beneficial developmental programmes while adhering to the constraints and directives imposed by the state. Okunna, cited in Asemah et al. (2017, p. 57), states that "the development media theory prioritises development and nation-building over press freedoms and individual rights." The theory posits that the mass media should support the government's developmental efforts, and that the government should regulate the media to accomplish this objective.

This theory fits this study because it advocates for the use of mass media for developmental purposes, which is the central focus of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This implies that radio, as a medium of mass communication, should take a leading role in promoting mass participation in SDG-related programmes. Hence, the researchers adopt this theory to explain how radio is faring in this essential task.

Methodology

The researchers adopted a survey research design, which was considered the most appropriate for this study as it allows for the exploration of individuals' ideas and perceptions on matters of public interest (Anyanwu et al., 2017). The population for the study comprised residents of Ohaji-Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022 bulletin), the projected population of the area is 254,200. The Survey-Monkey online sample size calculator was used to determine a sample size of 385, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The respondent-driven sampling (RDS) chain referral method was employed to identify participants. This technique was chosen because it enabled the researchers to select participants relevant to the investigation by identifying specific WhatsApp groups that connected members of the community.

A self-developed questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument contained items directly related to the research questions and was structured in a Likert-scale dichotomous format, allowing respondents to freely express their opinions. The questionnaire was validated through face validity: each researcher reviewed the instrument independently to ensure the items addressed the study's objectives. The questionnaire was administered and retrieved using Google Forms, an online survey platform. It was distributed through various community-based WhatsApp groups comprising members from different communities within the LGA. As responses were submitted, researchers received email notifications. The questionnaire was re-shared multiple times over a two-week period, with the researchers actively soliciting participation from individuals belonging to these communities. Examples of such WhatsApp groups include Obile NewsRoom, Awarra Court Area Forum, and Egbema Youth Forum, among others. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistical tools specifically, frequencies, simple percentages, and mean analysis.

Results

During the data collection period, 359 out of 385 distributed questionnaires were returned and deemed valid for analysis. This yielded a response rate of 93.2%, which is considered suitable for the study.

The researchers conducted the analysis using the responses obtained from the questionnaire. Before addressing the psychographic data related to the research questions, the socio-demographic data of the respondents were first examined.

Table 1: Bio-data of respondents

	Options	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	177	49.3%
	Female	182	50.6%
	Total	359	100
Age	18-22	24	6.6%
	23-27	76	21.1%
	28-32	121	33.7%
	33 and above	138	38.4%
	Total	359	100
Qualification	Diploma	50	13.9%
	1 st degree	162	45.1%
	Masters	127	35.3%
	Others	20	5.5%
	Total	359	100
Marital Status	Single	129	35.9%
	Married	172	47.9%
	Divorced	33	9.1%
	Widow/Widower	25	6.9%
	Total	359	100
Occupation	Self-employed	155	43.1%
	Civil servant	54	15.0%
	Professional	128	35.6%
	Others	22	6.1%
	Total	359	100%

Source: Field survey, 2025

This table shows that 50.6% of the respondents were female, while the largest age group was those aged 33 and above, accounting for 38.4%. First-degree holders constituted 45.1% of the respondents. Furthermore, 47.9% of the sampled respondents were married, and 43.1% were self-employed. These findings suggest a gender balance among the respondents, with a slightly higher proportion of women. Additionally, the results indicate that the majority of respondents had attained at least secondary school education, which positions them to be adequately informed and capable of responding to issues related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Results

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Table 2: Level of radio awareness of the SDG objectives among residents of Ohaji/Egbema LGA, Imo State, Nigeria

Option	Yes	No	Can't say	Total	percentage
I own and listen to radio programmes.	287 80%	36 10%	36 10%	359	100%
I frequently listen to Radio programmes.	215 60%	36 10%	108 30%	359	100%
Are you aware of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) initiative of the United Nations organisation?	359 100%	00 00%	00 00%	359	100%
Have you ever listened to programmes promoting SDG from your radio set?	215 60%	72 20%	72 20%	359	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Data from the table above implies that at an average of 75%, of the respondents demonstrate a high level of radio listenership and awareness of the SDGs among residents of Ohaji/Egbema is high. Which means that residents of Ohaji-Egbema are well enlightened about the SDGs through radio listenership.

Table 3: Extent radio awareness programmes on SDG objectives influence participation in sustainable development Goals programmes among residents of Ohaji-Egbema LGA, Imo

Option	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
I have heard about SDG programmes that are beneficial to me from Radio stations.	36	179	144	00	359	2.6	Accept
Radio awareness programmes promote youth participation in SDG Programmes.	108	179	72	00	359	3.1	Accept
Radio SDG-related programmes have enlightened me on how to leverage such opportunities.	108	143	54	54	359	2.8	Accept
I have benefited from SDG programmes targeted at youths within my area	36	36	251	36	359	2.2	Reject
Average mean						2.6	Accept

Source: field survey, 2025

Data from the table above reveal that, with an average mean of 2.6, the respondents acknowledged that radio awareness programmes have a positive influence on their readiness to participate in SDG programmes within their localities. The implication is that radio programmes on the SDGs not only create awareness but also increase public willingness to engage in SDG initiatives within the LGA and the state.

Table 4: Perception of residents of Ohaji-Egbema LGA, Imo State, Nigeria on the attainment of SDG objectives in Nigeria by 2030

Option	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
My Local Government Area has benefited from the SDG programmes of the State.	00	143	108	108	359	2.0	Reject
My State has executed programmes to promote SDG initiatives in my locality	36	36	251	36	359	2.2	Reject
Imo State and Nigeria have done well in their efforts to attain the SDG initiative.	72	36	179	72	359	2.3	Reject
My LGA, State and Country will actualize the SDG objectives by the deadline in 2030.	72	108	72	108	359	2.4	Reject
Average mean						2.2	Reject

Source: field survey, 2025

Results from Table 4 above indicate that at an average mean of 2.2, respondents rejected that the Imo state and the Nigerian government can attain the sustainable Development Goals initiative by the expiration date of 2030. This implies that government efforts in rolling out SDGs programmes have not been commensurate to public awareness and participation readiness.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from research question one revealed that radio listenership and awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among residents of Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area (LGA) is significantly high, with an average of 75%. This implies that the residents actively consume content from various radio stations in the state, and the stations are fulfilling their role in creating awareness, informing, and educating the populace about SDG programmes. The role of radio in advancing the SDG agenda aligns with Dennis McQuail's Development Media Theory (1987), which posits that in developing countries, the mass media should support national development goals and be regulated by the government to ensure this objective is met (Asemah et al., 2017). It is therefore justifiable to assert that radio stations that support government development efforts by promoting public awareness have contributed meaningfully to national development. This finding is corroborated by the study of Akinyooye and Aransi (2020), which found that media platforms played a crucial role in raising awareness of development initiatives in their communities. The researchers further discovered that increased media knowledge of SDG programmes led community stakeholders to support poverty-alleviation projects. Similarly, Nefi (2018) affirmed that the traditional media are instrumental in facilitating communication and discourse among institutions, citizens, and experts towards achieving Agenda 2030.

Findings from research question two showed that, at an average mean of 2.6, respondents agreed that radio awareness programmes positively influenced their willingness to participate in SDG initiatives within their localities. This suggests that residents were well sensitised, informed, and educated about various SDG initiatives with potential benefits. However, despite their awareness and willingness to engage, respondents reported that they had not benefited from any SDG programme implemented by the Imo State Government. This suggests a disconnect between awareness and actual access to programme benefits. This supports the findings of Akinyooye and Aransi (2020), who stated that while media awareness is a necessary condition for achieving SDG poverty targets, it is not a sufficient one. In contrast, Christopher and Emmanuel (2021) found that residents of Benue State not only participated but actively engaged in Goals 1–5 of the 17 SDGs. This suggests that for awareness campaigns to be meaningful, development programmes must be equitably implemented to encourage mass participation. Otherwise, even with high awareness, the sustainability of such projects may be questioned.

Results from research question three indicated that, with an average mean of 2.2, most respondents disagreed that the Imo State and Nigerian governments are likely to attain the SDGs by the year 2030. This implies a perceived lack of sufficient commitment by both state and federal governments to the SDG targets, despite being signatories to the agreement at the United Nations. Respondents affirmed that neither level of government has done enough to execute initiatives that would bring about sustainable development in their locality. This aligns with the study by Doi, Osawa, and Tsutsumida (2022), which found that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted global progress towards achieving the SDGs. Nonetheless, the case of Nigeria exemplifies a broader issue of signing international treaties without fulfilling the obligations attached. This pattern was previously observed with Nigeria's failure to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which preceded the current SDGs.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is concluded that radio remains an essential mass communication tool in advancing the SDG agenda in Nigeria and, in particular, Imo State. However, despite the awareness created by radio stations, the Imo State Government has not done enough to ensure that SDG initiatives reach rural communities such as Ohaji/Egbema. This inadequacy has contributed to residents' scepticism about the feasibility of achieving the SDGs by 2030 at both state and national levels.

Recommendations

In light of the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Radio stations should continue their commitment to promoting the Sustainable Development Goals and other development programmes in line with the principles of McQuail's Development Media Theory.
2. The state and federal governments, alongside non-governmental organisations, should move beyond mere publicity of programmes and ensure that actual beneficiaries receive tangible benefits through due diligence and proper monitoring.
3. The Imo State and Nigerian governments should not merely ratify international treaties but should demonstrate genuine commitment towards achieving the targets within the stipulated timelines, thereby positioning Nigeria as a serious member of the global development community.

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