Listenership to '*Farmers Round Table'* programme on Unity FM, Abakaliki and Attitude of Peasant Farmers towards Innovative Agricultural Practices in Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Globally, radio is recognized as one of the potent tools for rapid development of all sectors of the economy including agriculture, its potentiality and pivotal roles cannot be over-emphasized. The study therefore appraised the Audience Listenership to Farmers' Round Table Agricultural Programme on Radio Nigeria, Unity Fm, Abakaliki. The paper was hinged on Development Media Theory. Survey research method was adopted and a population of one hundred and eighty-six residents of Abakaliki metropolis was randomly sampled. One of the major findings in the study was that, the programme Farmers' Round Table on UnityFm, Abakaliki was strategic in its contribution to agricultural transformation in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, especially among the youths. The researchers therefore recommended that: The Ebonyi State Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, International Fund for Agricultural Development, IFAD, FADAMA III and other local and international agricultural donor agencies should collaborate to reactivate the star agricultural programme which has gone into extinction due to lack of sponsorship.

Keywords: Audience, listenership, radio, agricultural, programme

Introduction

Agriculture has remained the oldest venture of man and society, Nigeria historically is reputed as an agricultural country with the thirty-six (36) states of Nigeria including Ebonyi State naturally endowed with different agricultural foods which made it to gain more popularity and momentum in the recent years. Agricultural development globally no doubt is essentially pivotal in the overall well-being of man and the society. In Ebonyi state, 'Ebonyi Rice' has become of international standard in terms of production and quality and has export merits, Benue state can boast of greater yam production, in states in the northern Nigeria, production of beans and other farm produce are done through mechanized farming operations. The expansion of agriculture through the mass media is gradually attracting the attention of the government and international agricultural donor agencies. Hence, any government that toys with agriculture risks not only its socio-economic development but the future of both the rural and urban residents as it remained a wonderful tool for measuring rural and national transformation.

Agricultural development, if fully harnessed has the capacity to fast track great production and equitable distribution of food that guarantees food availability and security to man. However, the food production capacity of an average Nigerian farmer and the rapid development of agriculture to a large extent depend on the dosages and avalanche of messages or information received via the mass media, especially radio which has often been described by scholars as the friend of the farmers. Nwankwo and Ojo (2021, P.59) opine that:

> radio provides access to information for a large number of people, both literate and non-literates, and it is very cheap to acquire, own and maintain a radio set without dependence on electric power supply, radio's uniquely pervasive and penetrative characteristics make it stand out amongst other media channels.

For active participation in agricultural development process, the mass media have multiple responsibilities of mobilizing the farmers and widening their horizon of knowledge on innovations and new technologies that could ensure better farming operations. Abana and Galadima (2021, p.1) note that, "the efforts of the mass media in promoting and preserving society and its ideals cannot be over-emphasised". The late marriage between agriculture and the mass media contributed to where we are today in terms of agricultural revolution.

In line with the mission and vision of Radio Nigeria to be at the vanguard of national development, Farmers' Round Table Agricultural Programme on Radio Nigeria, Unity FM, Abakaliki which started in Radio Nigeria, Unity Fm, Abakalkik on October tenth 2017 was conceptualized by the former Senior Special Assistant to the Ebonyi State Governor on Agricultural Services, Professor Ndubisi Idenyi and co-sponsored by the International Fund For Agricultural Development, (IFAD) in Ebonyi state to provide the desired dosages of information to farmers in Ebonyi State about government's new policies and programmes on agriculture and to serve as a feedback tool between the government and the farmers. Farmers' Round Table Agricultural Programme is a one hour interactive programme (phone-in programme) on the stable of Radio Nigeria, Unity FM, Abakaliki that provided opportunity for farmers and others interested in agriculture to comment and make useful contributions on some topical issues in agriculture with the intention to revolutionize and transform the sector.

Sulieman (2007, p. 15) agrees that:

> the invention of radio has been acknowledged as one of the most important landmarks in human communication, comparable to the invention of the printing press, since its appearance early in the 20th century, it has grown to a global phenomenon in effective mass communication, radio stations have sprout all over the planet, helping to convey information and ideas to distant and isolated locations.

Radio has become a powerful potent tool in disseminating credible and useful information to the masses, especially in agriculture because of its affordability, accessibility and its ability to break language barrier. Adamu (2007, p.62) opines that, "radio might have had, from its inception, the interest of the farmers as a cardinal point of duty, to not report about it, but to highlight all the development in the agricultural sector, this is made possible by the ability of radio medium to bring messages clearly not only to the farmers' home, but to the farmer who is busy tilling away in his vast agricultural land".

Radio House (2011) affirms that, "the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria has a tradition of covering grade one events in a grand style, records have it that no media house in Nigeria has been able to square up with the Corporation in terms of superb coverage of events of national importance", especially as it concerns agriculture. The Corporation has turned the tide of broadcasting in Africa by initiating the policy of 'Handing the Microphone Back to the People' where the views of people in the grassroots, the voiceless and the less privileged ones were sought on issues about them and get the government or the authorities concerned to rather react on the points and issues raised by such caliber of people in the society.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to evaluate audience listenership and acceptance of *Farmers' Round Table Agricultural Programme* on Radio Nigeria, Unity FM, Abakaliki.

The specific objectives of the study are:

i. To find out the extent of influence of Farmers' Round Table Agricultural Programme on Radio Nigeria, Unity FM, Abakaliki on the targeted audience (farmers) in Ebonyi State.

ii. to determine the contributions of Farmers Round Table Agricultural programme on Radio Nigeria, Unity FM, Abakaliki in the transformation of agriculture from subsistence to commercial level in Ebonyi state, especially among the youths.

Research Questions

The following questions were drawn from the research objectives to support the study:

i. What is the extent of influence of Farmers' Round Table Agricultural Programme on Radio Nigeria, Unity FM, Abakaliki on the targeted audience (farmers) in Ebonyi State?

ii. What are the contributions of Farmers Round Table Agricultural programme on Radio Nigeria, Unity FM, Abakaliki in the transformation of agriculture from subsistence to commercial level in Ebonyi state, especially among the youths?

CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSIONS

Radio in Propelling Agricultural Development in Nigeria

The advent of Radio in Nigeria in 1932 with the introduction of Radio Diffusion Services (RDS) as a mass communication medium heralded the revolution and tremendous transformation in the communication industry. Okunna and Omenugha (2001) maintain that, most of the contents of those rediffused programmes were of development messages. The outstanding and distinguishing place of radio in reaching large heterogeneous and diverse audience simultaneously cannot be over emphasized. Throng of communication scholars argue that radio had played significant and pivotal roles in the dissemination of information to people in both rural and urban areas, especially among farmers in Nigeria.

Olajide (2016, p.2) opines that," the agricultural extension system in Nigeria has been known for a long time to depend on the use of mass media and extension agents for information dissemination". Ibeawuchi and Nwachukwu (2010) recall that, this system has been marred by a lot of challenges, especially in the area of "feedback," as the majority of farmers depend on radio stations. Yahaya and Badiru (2002) agree that the farmers rely on the radio stations as their source of information without necessarily being able to express their understanding of, experience with, or opinion about an issue that concerns them. Okwu, Kuku, Aba (2007) state that, absence of a functional agricultural information delivery system is a major constraint to agricultural development in Nigeria. Ada (2018, p.9) agrees with above statement and laments that, "the neglect agriculture had suffered was the reason Nigeria was plunged into economic crisis because the oil which Nigeria abandoned agriculture for, is no longer the main stay of the economy".

Visualizing Radio as a Major Contributor to Agricultural Development in Nigeria

The veracity, versatility and friendly posture of radio as a potent medium of mass communication has made it a powerful organ to drive development in both rural and urban areas. Adamu (2007, p.61) rightly points out that, "radio as information medium has over the time evolved into an effective and versatility medium that has its own complete characteristic officially dejects and potential providing the needed information using the best medium has been identified as the basic necessities for rapid development especially in the agricultural sector.

Okiyi (2007) observes that for many developments effort to succeed the people must be provided with adequate information that will enable them to understand the significance of the project to their lives. This is why Okiyi (2007) also argues that radio is believed to be a resource required and utilized in order to make an informal decision. Nsi (1993) says that there is something about radio that makes it most appropriate for integrated rural development.

Udomisor (2007 p.198) avers that, "a radio has been used in several countries to create awareness and impact skills to farmers, radio is popularly used in agricultural communication because it is cheap and can be used in areas where there is no electricity". Robert, Roger and Gordana (2003,p.1) maintain that, "radio is a powerful communication tool, experience with rural radio has shown the potential for agricultural extension to benefit from both the reach and the relevance that local broadcasting can achieve by using participatory communication approaches".

Empirical Review

A good number of research work has been conducted in this area of focus, some of them include Jamila (2020), Sulieman (2007).Jamila (2020) conducted a study on the role of radio in promoting agricultural development; A case study of National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services, Zaria. The study ordinarily should have adopted survey research as the method but the author did an analytical study using extant literature which created a big intellectual lacuna that this present study seeks to fill by using survey research method. Another greatest weakness of the above study is the failure of the author to anchor the study on a particular theory for better understanding. This also paved the way for the present study to address by adopting a suitable theory.

Sulieman (2007) conducted a study on comparative study of audience perception of FRCN Kaduna and Enugu Hausa and Igbo programmes on agriculture for development. The study adopted survey research similar to the present research with a population of two hundred and seven. The study also made use of Development Media Theory. The paper in its findings discovered that there is general satisfaction of the programme and relevant. It then recommended that, the operators of these stations and others across the country need to develop new creative ideas in packaging such programmes. It also stressed need to develop more participatory approach involving the farmers on some of the programmes, improving the mode of feedback and getting specialists in all areas of agriculture to be involved both in providing research findings and also in giving opportunity to interact with the target groups- the farmers. Findings from the study show that Radio is still a powerful and potent medium in promoting agriculture for development. The major intellectual lacuna in this work is that it failed to pin a particular radio programme for study. The present study by this author is determined to address the lacuna by identifying the Farmers' Round Table Agricultural Programme on Radio Nigeria, Unity Fm, Abakaliki which was the researchers' star programme while working in the station as a Journalist.

Theoretical Framework

This study is hinged on Two Step Flow Media Model. The Two Step Model was formulated in 1948 by Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson and Hazel Gaudet. The model was contained in their book, The People's Choice after research into voters' decision-making processes during the 1940 U.S Presidential election. The idea behind the Two Step Flow was that most people form their opinions under the influence of opinion leaders, who in turn are influenced by the mass media. The theory has particular reference to the diffusion and adoption of agricultural innovations. The theory in its tenet holds the view that many people had limited exposure to the mass media and get their information second hand from opinion leaders who would have sharpened the news and messages received first hand and interpret it to suit their own world views. Therefore, the adoption of this theory is necessitated by the fact that the mass media have the capacity to function more effectively and efficiently with other notable variables to optimally convert a specific audience. In justification for the adoption of this model, the researchers agree to the fact that most information on agriculture to farmers flow on two steps. One from the Opinion Leaders and two to the farmers through the mass media which are subject to interpretation and distortion of relevant facts. The Model truly represents the position of this work which was a Phone-In-Programme on the agricultural programme tagged Farmers' Round Table on Radio Nigeria, Unity Fm, Abakaliki. Here information flows from stakeholders (Opinion Leaders) in the agriculture sector to the farmers via the radio.

Research Methodology

The study adopted survey research method to illicit the desired information from the targeted population, which is residents of Abakaliki metropolis. Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the respondents. Questionnaire was the major instrument for data collection. One hundred and eighty-six copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques
The sample size for this study is one hundred and eighty-six (186) residents of Abakaliki metropolis. Taro Yamane's statistical formula for obtaining a known population was used. The population consists of one hundred and eighty-six residents of Abakaliki metropolis who were randomly sampled based on locations at Amike Aba where the Radio station is situated as seventy people were randomly selected, Onwe Road Abakaliki has sixty and residents of Nwokpor area of Abakaliki which also has fifty making up to the one hundred and eighty-six residents the questionnaire were administered.

Measuring Instrument
The measuring instrument for this study is questionnaire which was structured into two segments A and B. Segment A contains information on the respondents' demography while Segment B has detailed information on derived from the research questions and objectives of the study.

Method of Data Analysis
Data collected were analyzed, interpreted and presented in tables for the easy assimilation and understanding. Simple percentage was used.

Presentation of Data and Results
The One hundred and eighty-six (186) copies of questionnaire distributed were returned completely because of the drop, fill and pick method adopted by the researcher. The tables below indicate other valuable and detailed information.

Demographic Features
Section A
Table1: Age

Age	Frequency	Percentage
15-25	30	16%
26-35	50	27%
36-45	60	33%
45 and above	46	24%
Total	186	100%

Source: Field Survey 2022
On the table above the age distribution of the respondents indicate that people of thirty years representing sixteen percent were on the age bracket of between fifteen and twenty five, those within the age bracket of twenty six and thirty five were fifty representing twenty seven percent, as respondents on the age bracket of thirty six and forty five form sixty in the frequency table representing thirty three percent, while those aged forty five were forty six representing twenty four percent.

Table2: Sex

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	88	48%
Female	98	52%
Total	186	100%

Source: Field Survey 2022
Out of the one hundred and eighty-six respondents eighty-eight were male, while ninety-eight were female, this indicates that the female folk listen more and participated on the programme than their male counterparts.

Table 3: Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	90	49%
Single	79	42%
Divorced	17	9%
Total	186	100%

Source: Field Survey 2022

Here, those who are married constitute forty-nine percent, the single ones were forty-two percent, only nine percent of the respondents said they were divorced.

Table 4: Educational Background

Educational Background	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	85	46%
Secondary	15	8%
No education	86	46%
Total	186	100%

Source: Field Survey 2022

Majority of the people said they had no education at all which stood at forty-six percent, those who had secondary education were only eight percent, while respondents with primary education were forty-six percent.

Table 5: Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Student	70	38%
Civil Servant	23	12%
Trading	18	10%
Farming	75	40%
Total	186	100%

Source: Field Survey 2022

Forty percent of the respondents were farmers, thirty-eight were students and twelve said they were civil servants, while only ten percent were traders.

Section B

Table 6: Do you listen to Radio Nigeria, Unity Fm, Abakaliki?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	146	78%
No	40	22%
Total	186	100%

Source: Field Survey 2022

On this table above, seventy-eight percent of the respondents agree that they listen to Radio Nigeria, Unity

Fm, Abakaliki, only an insignificant percentage of twenty-two percent said they do not listen

Table 7: Do you listen to Farmers' Round Table on Unity Fm, Abakaliki?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	150	81%
No	36	19%
Total	186	100%

Source: Field Survey 2022

Greater percentage of the respondents constituting eighty-one percent agreed that they listen and participate on the Programme Farmers Round Table on Radio Nigeria, Unity Fm, Abakaliki, as nineteen percent said that they do not listen to the programme.

Table 8: How frequent do you listen to the programmeFarmers' Round Table on Unity Fm, Abakaliki?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Always	80	43%
Sometimes	36	19%
Not always	42	23%
At least once a month	28	15%
Total	186	100%

Source: Field Survey 2022

Forty-three percent of the respondents said they listen to the programme regularly, nineteen percent claimed they do listen sometimes, twenty-three percent do no listen always, while fifteen percent noted that they listen to the programme once in a month, especially during the farming season.

Table 9: Does the programme promote greater agricultural activities in Ebonyi State?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	155	83%
No	31	17%
Total	186	100%

Source: Field Survey 2022

From the table above, eighty-three percent of the respondents agreed that the programme helped to promote greater agricultural activities in Ebonyi State, while only seventeen percent said no.

Table 10: To what extent does the programme contribute to enhancing greater participation in farming operations among the youths?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Large extent	122	66%
Some extent	49	26%
Neutral	15	8%
Total	186	100%

Source: Field Survey 2022

Larger percentage constituting sixty-six percent agreed that the programme Farmers' Round Table on the stable of Radio Nigeria, Unity Fm, Abakaliki enhance greater participation in farming by the youths, twenty six percent said it enhance it to some extent, while only eight percent chose to remain neutral.

Table 11: How would you rate the programme Farmers' Round Table on Radio Nigeria, Unity Fm, Abakaliki?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	71	39%
High	58	31%

Average	30	16%
Low	20	10%
Very low	7	4%
Total	186	100%

Source: Field Survey 2022

Thirty-nine percent rated the programme very high, thirty-one percent of the respondents agreed it is high, sixteen percent rated the programme to be on the average, ten percent said it is very low, while only four percent claimed it is low.

Discussion of Findings

From the findings of the study, it was discovered that the programme Farmers' Round Table on Radio Nigeria, Unityfm, Abakaliki has contributed significantly in promoting greater agricultural activities in Ebonyi State and commands greater listenership among the people, especially farmers who rely on it for better information on agricultural activities and new inventions in the sector. It was also discovered that, the programme enhanced and encouraged greater participation in farming among the youths in Ebonyi State.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is worthy to conclude that, the programme, Farmers' Round Table on Radio Nigeria, Unityfm, Abakaliki has played pivotal roles in raising and re-awakening the consciousness of the people, especially the youths towards overall agricultural transformation in not only Ebonyi State but in Nigeria at a time of economic depression, insecurity, political instability and declining oil which the nation has depended on for economic survival. It was also, a piece for the government to begin to think agriculture, talk agriculture and above all act agriculture, if the country will overcome the current economic woos bedeviling it and demonstrate enough political will in utilizing annual agricultural budgets for farming operations and to pay an undivided attention to genuine farmers' plight.

Recommendations

From the conclusions drawn that the programme Farmers' Round Table on Radio Nigeria, Unityfm, Abakaliki has contributed significantly in promoting greater agricultural activities in Ebonyi State and commands greater listenership among the people as well as enhanced and encouraged greater participation in farming among the youths in Ebonyi State; it becomes pertinent to make the following recommendations:

- The Ebonyi State Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, International Fund for Agricultural Development, IFAD, FADAMA III and other local and international agricultural donor agencies should collaborate to reactivate the star agricultural programme which has gone into extinction due to lack of sponsorship
- That government at all levels should encourage greater youths' participation in agriculture by providing enough conducive environments for mechanized farming in Ebonyi State.

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