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**MASS MEDIA COVERAGE OF DEVELOPMENT NEWS IN RURAL AND URBAN  
AREAS OF BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*The place of the mass media in accelerating the development of the society and its people enjoys a global recognition. In the Nigerian context, the Nigerian media have been accused of neglecting community development initiatives. This study investigated the coverage of development news reports by journalists in Bayelsa State. The aim of the study was to comparatively investigate the challenges of development news reporting in urban and rural areas of Bayelsa State. The specific objectives of the study were, among others, to: evaluate patterns of development news reporting of urban and rural areas by journalists in Bayelsa State; and to find out the challenges of reporting development news events in urban and rural areas of Bayelsa State. The study was anchored on the Agenda-Setting theory. The investigation used the descriptive survey research design to undertake a census of the 320 registered journalists in Bayelsa State. Findings of the study showed that development news reports in the rural areas were significantly neglected in favour of the urban areas. It was also found out that ownership interest was the leading cause of neglect of development news reports in the urban and rural areas of Bayelsa State. Based on these findings, the study recommended, among other things, that as part of their social responsibility and in keeping with ethical standard, journalists in Bayelsa State should strive to identify development news sources in the rural communities and that the ownership of media stations in Bayelsa State should put public interest above personal or parochial concerns.*

**Key Terms:** *Development News, Development News Reporting, Journalists in Bayelsa State, Mass Media, Rural and Urban Areas*

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**INTRODUCTION**

The organic view of the society conceives the human society as a social system that progressively develops rather than being simply constructed. What this means is that the contributions of every member (individuals), segment

(communities, groups, organisations, etc) and organ (governments, agencies, institutions, etc) of the system is foundational to growth and stability. It also means that the activities of all members, segments and organs of the social system play complimentary roles towards the advancement or development of the system. This contributory effort in the making of a progressive society adds to nation building and saddles every member of the society with the creation of the social apparatuses that are consciously exploited to keep the society and its people progressive. This is the reason citizen-participation is encouraged during elections or other state processes that are targeted at promoting the well-being of the society and its people (Mefalopus and Kamlongera, 2004; Inagaki, 2007). The creation of governments, laws, institutions and agencies by the members of a society is informed by the desire to maintain order, ensure growth, efficiency and stability. The mass media institution, in many democracies, are considered as the fourth arm of government as they serve as the bridge between the government and the people. This intermediary posture of the mass media draws from the fact that the mass media institution serves as a check on both government and the people. In other words, the media not only occupy the estate to hold the government accountable to its constitutional mandates to the people, but also have the mandate to hold the people accountable to their rights and responsibilities.

Based on the importance of their functions to the management and growth of the society and its people, the mass media enjoy global recognition as powerful tools for social change. The condition is that in any society (democratic or autocratic, free or repressive), the mass media institution is known as a critical stakeholder. In democracies, the mass media perform some functions that enhance the smooth running of the society. The traditional roles of the media in most democracies include information dissemination, education and entertainment. Added to these, is the surveillance function performed by the media in the society. It is worthy of note that the provision of information is considered as the leading role of the mass media in the society. This is based on the importance of information in keeping people abreast of events or occurrences within their immediate and larger environments. This accounts for the argument that providing people with requisite information is one of the key ways of enhancing their independence (UNESCO, 1980; Smith, 1996; Reddi, 2009; Sachdeva, 2009). The information function of the mass media can manifest in form of warnings about impending dangers or the creation of awareness about the usefulness or otherwise of an issue or phenomenon.

The news and information role of the media have been described as the surveillance of the society. According to Dominick (2012), the mass media have taken over the place of traditional sentinels or lookouts who surveyed the environment and reported news about events and dangers in primitive tribes. Thus, the surveillance function of the mass media is sub-divided into beware and instrumental surveillance. While beware surveillance is used to warn people about impending dangers that may arise from particular circumstances or occurrences, instrumental surveillance is used by the media to disseminate information that is useful or everyday life (Dominick, 2012). It is this crucial role of the mass media in the management of the society that underscores the interplay between the two (media and society).

In Nigeria, for instance, the importance of the mass media to the well-being of the society necessitates the constitutional provision which unequivocally guarantees freedom of expression and the press. Section 22 of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution stipulates that the press and other agencies of the mass media shall continually be free to uphold the responsibility of holding the government accountable to the people. This constitutional provision clearly identifies the press and other media of mass communication as the watchdog of the society whose activities in achieving and sustaining socio-cultural, economic and political growth cannot be overemphasised.

### **Brief Background of Bayelsa State**

Geographically speaking, Bayelsa is one of the states in the south-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria. It is also one of the states in the Niger Delta region of the country. The capital of Bayelsa State is Yenagoa. The State was created out of the old Rivers State on October 1, 1996, with eight Local Government Areas; namely: *Brass, Ekeremor, Kolokuma/Opokuma, Nembe, Ogbia, Sagbama, Southern-Ijaw* and *Yenagoa*. The main language of the people of Bayelsa State is *Ijaw*, with dialects such as Kolokuma, Bomu, Nembe, Epie-Atissa and Ogbia.

With a land mass of 10, 773 km<sup>2</sup>(4,159.59m), the state has a riverine and estuarine settings. Many of the communities are surrounded by water, thereby making them inaccessible by roads (Bayelsa at a Glance, 2017). According to the 2006 census, Bayelsa state has a population of 1, 704, 515.

Despite the presence of multinational oil companies and its contribution to Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings, Bayelsa State is still faced with infrastructural deficits and environmental degradation. The State is mainly populated by rural dwellers who lack basic amenities and social infrastructure such as roads, schools, health centres, safe drinking water and electricity. The

State has the presence of some media stations. They are: Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), Africa Independent Television (AIT), Niger Delta Television (NDTV), Ray Power FM, Rhythm FM, Royal FM, People's FM, Radio Bayelsa (Glory FM), New Waves, Izon Times, The Light, Izon links, Niger Delta Herald, Banner News and Correspondents of national newspapers, such as The Guardian Newspaper, Nation Newspaper, Punch Newspaper, Sun Newspaper, Vanguard Newspaper and Thisday Newspaper.

This study is concerned with journalists and correspondents (reporters) that report for these media organisations in Bayelsa State. It is to investigate the challenges encountered by these journalists and correspondents in reporting development news events in urban and rural areas of the State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Within the context of the Nigerian media, efforts to promote national interest through unbiased coverage and presentation of reports has been plagued by the desire of serving certain interests. While government-owned media stations increasingly serve as mouth pieces of the regime or political party in power, the private media organisations are essentially concerned with profit-making. The result of this slide is that the Nigerian media are increasingly assuming the platforms for the promotion and protection of ownership interest at the expense of public interest. Notwithstanding the fact that the reportorial situation in Bayelsa State appears to significantly favour events and occurrences in urban centres, the issue of subjectivity in development news reporting is quite noticeable. This is because several issues that concern the socio-cultural and economic conditions of even the urban dwellers are grossly under-reported in both government and private media stations operating in the State. It appears that events or occurrences that are accorded space in the Bayelsa media space are issues that concern high profile traditional and political office holders. Issues such as local technology, agriculture, education, health, community self-help efforts, etc are relegated to the background.

Apparently, journalists (reporters) in the State are constrained to reporting essentially the interests of the owners of their organisations, leaving no space or airtime for development challenges and development strides in both urban and rural centres of the State. This reportorial situation has slowed down the spate of development in the State. The underlying question is: what are the peculiar challenges confronting journalists covering development news in urban and rural areas of Bayelsa State?

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study was to comparatively investigate the challenges of development newsreporting in urban and rural areas of Bayelsa State. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. evaluate patterns of development news reporting of urban and rural areas by journalists in Bayelsa State;
2. find out how journalists in Bayelsa State source for development news reports;
3. find out the challenges of reporting development news events in urban and rural areas of Bayelsa State.

### **Operational Definition of Terms**

The definition of the following terms is based on their application within the context of this work:

**Development News:** Development news are the reports of people's spectacular efforts or inventions which can stimulate other people's creative abilities towards solving or improving their socio-economic conditions.

**Rural Area:** This is a geographical area with features of an agrarian or poorly developed settlement.

**Urban Area:** An urban area is a town or city. It is an area that hosts major central business or political activities of a large community. It is considered as a more developed area of a community especially in terms of the presence of some basic amenities and infrastructure that are non-existent in the rural areas.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Agenda Setting Theory**

The Agenda-setting theory was propounded by McCombs and Shaw in 1972. The Agenda-setting theory conceptualises the role the mass media play in shaping and influencing the opinion of members of their audiences especially on issues of public interest. The condition that accounts for this situation is based on the fact that regardless of the extent of development or civilisation a society has attained, the fact remains that the mass media serve as people's window to the world. According to Okon (2001), studies are now changing from media use and attitude change to information and new cognition acquired from the media. Folarin (2005) explains that the agenda setting theory does not ascribe to the media the power to determine what we actually think; but it does ascribe to them the power to determine what we are think about. He explains further that the media set agenda for political campaigns and that the element involved in agenda setting

include; the quality or frequency of reporting, prominence given to the reports through headlines display, pictures and layout in newspapers, magazines, films, graphics or timing in radio and television, etc.

Lipmann (1922) cited in Ojobor (2002) states that the media help to put pictures of the world in the minds of the audience. This explains the power of the mass media to set agenda and raise issues of public importance. The press presents an agenda of these topics they consider salient, hoping that it will resonate with the public and lead to an action that calls for a review of how the government or its agencies have tackled the issues raised for the overall development of the society. Buttressing this fact, Okunna (1999) states that the mass media can set political agenda for the masses and mould public opinion by defining the boundaries within which people think about and discuss public issues. Thus, Griffin (2000) citing McCombs and Shaw (1972), states that the mass media have the ability to transfer the salience of items on their news agenda to the public agenda. He adds that journalists and the mass media in the free world have a deserved reputation for independence and fairness and that members of the mass media audience look to news professionals for cues on where to lend their attention and judge as important what the media judge as important.

The media provide information, entertainment, enlightenment as well as the safeguard of civil liberty. This creates the assumption in the audience that the issues upon which the mass media place emphasis must necessarily be important. George (2006), lending credence to this proposition, states that “the amount of attention given to an issue in the media affects the level of importance the public assigns to that issue” (p. 459). Ndimele and Innocent (2006) argue that since people rely on the media for information about events in their society and the world at large, whatever the media accord attention would be considered important. What this means is that the level of attention accorded an issue by the mass media makes that issue to assume some degree of relevance in the conjecture of their audiences (Heath, 2005).

### **The Concept of Development News**

A development news is an account of a development event or stride reported in the mass media. It is also the account of development problems or challenges that a society is confronted with. What this means is that the coverage and reportage of development news not only involves the dissemination of information but also the effort to pursue development goals or to direct efforts towards solving development problems through mass communication. Ramirez (1989) cited in Anaeto and Anaeto (2010) defines development news reporting as the deliberate

effort by the mass media to seek solutions to the development problems of a society. This effort is constrained by the resolve of the mass media to contribute their part in order to make the world a better place (Itule and Anderson, 2008). Development news is different from the conventional news which has to do with the reportage of unusual events and occurrences, mostly to educate and inform the audience. Development news involves disseminating information not only to educate and inform but also to motivate and mobilise the audience to undertake actions that should enhance the well-being of the individual and the wider society (Udoakah, 2001). Anaeto and Anaeto (2010) aver that development news involves information that focuses on the development needs of a society. Development news focuses on informing, educating, motivating and mobilising people rather than merely informing and entertaining them.

Development news not only identifies and highlights development problems. It also identifies and highlights development efforts of different groups in the society. Anaeto and Anaeto (2010) state that development news beckons on individuals, groups and authorities to rise to the development of the society by playing their roles in the development process. Uttachandani (2005) observes that development news not only reports issues about development, such as poverty, decay or absence of basic social infrastructure, illiteracy, etc but also beckons on the populace to participate in the development process.

### **Attributes of Development News**

Anaeto and Anaeto (2010) have identified some attributes of development news, including:

**Purposefulness:** according to Anaeto and Anaeto (2010), development news is purposeful and goal-laden. The goal is not simply to inform but to facilitate development. It is to bring about some positive change and to promote the well-being of the society and its people. Quebral (2003) thus define development as the transformation of a society and the mass of its people from socio-economic and political backwardness to a stable economic growth that ensures greater economic performance and social well-being. Nwosu (2000) states that development news has a definite purpose. The purpose is to improve the quality of life of members of a society by reporting issues about health, agriculture, culture, education, festivals, rural transportation, marriages, community-based efforts, etc.

**Pragmatism:** development news is pragmatic. That is, it is not mere conventional news reports that simply inform, educate or entertain. It goes beyond education and entertainment to raise issues that should provoke not only the audience but

also the government and development partners to take certain actions. Development news targets to engender change. Ochonogor and Fyneface (2016) aver that the mass media are agents of change and development because they facilitate discourse on socio-cultural, economic and political matters. They add that the “the media stimulate growth and development by making new ideas and thoughts freely available to cross-sections of a society” (p. 61). What this means is that the dissemination of information about development efforts of different communities and groups in the society is crucial to stimulating development initiatives across different communities in the society.

**Relevance:** development news targets those conditions that are relevant to members of the public. This is why it is news beyond the regular political and economic reports that characterise the news bulletin of most mainstream media organisations. It focuses on stories and events that have relevance for the poor and secluded (Anaeto and Anaeto, 2010). Development news focuses on issues such as education, agriculture, environment, health, community development, social welfare, government policies, etc. it mirrors how these issues affect the people and national life.

**Mass-Oriented:** Development news is about the people in need of development. The people are the larger population of the society who mostly live in the remote settlements without adequate social infrastructure (Udoakah, 2004; Anaeto and Anaeto, 2010). It seeks to serve the information need of the people. It also projects the development efforts of different rural communities to the wider world.

**Scientific Outlook:** Development news is research-based. It adopts social science research tools and approaches, such as surveys, observations, sampling, etc to in gathering information that aid development. Udoakah (2001) identifies the importance of research in development news reporting. He argues that development news reporting cannot be successful if journalists and mass media stations do not carefully scan the rural and urban communities of a society not only to identify development problems and efforts but also to identify how government development policies affect the people. What this means that findings of development studies by journalists and the mass media should help the citizens, the government and development partners to direct efforts and resources to such conditions that promote better life.

**Participatory Journalism:** Development news reporting encourages participatory journalism. This is because, the development news reporter partners with the people in eliciting and disseminating development reports (Anaeto and Anaeto, 2010). Apart from the collaboration of the people in sourcing and disseminating



development reports, development news also involves the participation of the populace in the development process. Udoakah (2001) states that community mobilisation has become integral in the development process. He adds that efforts must be made by the mass media to “mobilise the citizens for the support of the political system, for economic development, increased food production, increased health habits and for participation in the political process” (p. 67). It goes to say that development news is not only about reporting development issues but more essentially, getting the citizens or communities involved in the development process. It is journalism of the people, with the people and for the people.

### **The Role of the Mass Media in Social Development**

The importance of the mass media in a country’s development process is the thrust of development journalism which involves the conscious and deliberate application of the mass media to address development problems. According to Anaeto and Anaeto (2010), development journalism involves the use of a country’s media for development purpose. The deliberate application of the mass media to pursue development is what distinguishes development journalism from conventional journalism. In other words, while conventional journalism is centrally concerned with reporting day-to-day occurrences in the society, development journalism aims at solving development problems. Thus, Uttamchandani (2005) states that development journalism focuses on ways of dealing with poverty, emancipating the oppressed and marginalised and mobilising the populace to participate in development processes.

The importance of communication to development underscores the articulation of own communication policies by different countries of the world. The purpose of a national communication policy is to functionally use communication to advance society. Anaeto and Anaeto (2010) state that a country’s communication policy can be deployed to orchestrate development at the local and international levels. At the local level, a country’s communication policy ensures that the media of communication are not concentrated in the hands of few political and economic power holders. It also ensures that the activities of the mass media provide equal attention to all segments of the society. The purposes of a National communication policy at the international scene is to check imperialism, to communicate the values a country stands for and to disseminate news of international significance in keeping with a country’s foreign policy (Luke, 1989). According to Momoh (1989) cited in Anaeto and Anaeto (2010), the main objective of Nigeria’s national communication policy is to exploit the resources

of mass communication to ensure the equitable distribution and balanced flow of information within and among the citizens of Nigeria. The policy stipulates that mass communication shall be used to:

1. support rational development initiatives and programmes and to positively affect the quality of life of the people of Nigeria through facilitating systematic and effective use and coordination of mass communication strategies and activities;
2. promote participation in national dialogue on development issues by all citizens, consistent with the emerging democratic culture and national constitutional provisions;
3. enhance access to information and communication infrastructure and new technologies, especially in rural areas;
4. preserve national cultural identity, promote the national cultural patrimony and enhance the development of cultural and artistic capabilities and institutions or public communication;
5. ensure the timely, orderly and effective growth of information and communication institutions and professions through standards setting capacity building; and
6. promote productive community, national, regional and international interchange (p. 32).

The articulation of this policy is based on the understanding of the importance of information in the management of the society. This is because information provides knowledge, caution and direction.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey method. A descriptive survey research design is used to document existing conditions or attitudes (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011). Survey was appropriate for this study because it enabled the investigation of development news reporting by journalists in Bayelsa State. The population of this study was 320, which is the number of registered practicing journalists in Bayelsa State as at October, 2018. This figure was obtained from the secretariat of the Nigeria Union of Journalists, Bayelsa State Council.

Based on the established manageable population, a census of all (320) registered and accredited journalists with the Nigeria Union of Journalists, Bayelsa State Council, formed the sample for the study. Data for this study were obtained using the questionnaire. Data were analysed quantitatively in statistical tables using weighted mean score based on a four-points Likert scale.

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Data for this study were obtained using copies of the questionnaire administered to practicing journalists that are registered with the Bayelsa State Chapel of the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ). A total of 320 copies of the questionnaire were administered to practicing journalists in Bayelsa State. Of this number, 311 (97%) copies were properly filled and returned. The other 9 (3%) copies were not returned.

**Table 1: Patterns of coverage of development news reports in urban and rural areas by journalists in Bayelsa State**

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Questionnaire Items</i>	<i>Responses</i>				<i>Total</i>	<i>WMS</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
		<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>D</i>			
1.	The coverage and reportage of development news is crucial to the development of the urban and rural areas of Bayelsa State.	512	477	22	13	1,024	3.2	Accepted
2.	Accordingly, my media organisation has development news beats for both rural and urban areas.	132	93	84	205	514	1.6	Rejected
3.	My media organisation has development news only for development news in urban areas.	588	267	60	45	960	3.0	Accepted
4.	My media organisation has correspondents or reporters who regularly report development news event in the rural areas.	112	96	178	162	548	1.7	Rejected

The presentation in Table 1 indicates that there is gross inequality in the coverage and reportage of development news events in rural and urban areas of Bayelsa State. Data presented in the table show that development news events in the rural areas of Bayelsa State were being neglected by journalists and the mass media in the State. This report is based on the weighted mean scores of 1.6, 3.0 and 1.7, respectively obtained by items 2, 3 and 4 of the questionnaire.

**Table 2: Sources of development news in urban and rural areas of Bayelsa State**

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Questionnaire Items</i>	<i>Responses</i>				<i>Total</i>	<i>WMS</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
		<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>D</i>			
5.	Opinion leaders	480	426	36	31	973	3.1	Accepted
6.	Activities of community-based organisations.	508	309	54	54	925	2.9	Accepted

7.	Ceremonies, festivals and other traditional events.	628	41715			1,060	3.4	Accepted
8.	Citizen journalists.	612	249	54	48	963	3.0	Accepted
9.	Social media.	104	99	198	153	554	1.7	Rejected
10.	Other media stations.	532	249	72	59	912	2.9	Accepted
11.	Civil society organisations	104	99	226	139	568	1.8	Rejected

Data presented in Table 2 indicate that the main sources of development news reports to journalists in Bayelsa State were opinion leaders, community based organisations, ceremonies, festivals and other traditional events. This is evident from the weighted mean scores of 3.1, 2.9 and 3.4, respectively obtained by items 5, 6 and 7 of the questionnaire. Data presented in the same table also show that journalists in Bayelsa State cover more of development news events in the urban areas than development news events in the rural areas of the State. This report is based on the weighted mean score of 3.0 and 1.7, respectively obtained by items 8 and 9 of the questionnaire.

**Table 3: Challenges of reporting development news in urban and rural areas of Bayelsa State**

S/N	Questionnaire items	Responses				Total	WMS	Remarks
		SA	A	SD	D			
12	Development news reporting by my organisation is strictly based on ownership interest.	532	354	52	34	972	3.1	Accepted
13	The geographical terrain of Bayelsa state encourage development news coverage of urban areas in preference to rural areas.	272	561	48	32	913	2.9	Accepted
14	The cultural environment propels development news coverage of rural in preference to urban areas.	152	174	98	168	592	1.9	Rejected
15	Political influence shapes development news contents in favour of urban areas	632	291	90	26	1,039	3.3	Accepted
16	The security situation favours news coverage of rural areas over urban areas.	196	159	278	70	703	2.2	Rejected
17	Ownership interest aligns development needs of urban dwellers over rural residents.	520	312	62	46	934	3.0	Accepted

18	News commercialisation drives coverage of urban areas more than rural centres.	584	327	82	15	1,008	3.2	Accepted
19	Illiteracy among the rural populace poses additional challenge.	172	114	150	155	591	1.9	Rejected
20	Lack of motivation of reporters by the management of their media organisations discourages development news coverage of rural areas.	384	417	84	34	919	2.9	Accepted
21	Unfriendly disposition of some news sources serve as a disincentive to rural development news reportage.	164	78	188	150	580	1.8	Rejected

The presentation in Table 3 shows that some of the challenges of development news reporting in rural and urban areas of Bayelsa State were ownership interest and the geographical terrain of the State. This report is evident from the weighted mean scores of 3.1 and 2.9, respectively obtained by items 12 and 13 of the questionnaire. Data presented in the table show that other challenges to development news reporting in urban and rural areas of Bayelsa State were news commercialisation and lack of motivation of development news reporting. This is based on the weighted mean score of 3.2 and 2.9, respectively obtained by items 18 and 20 of the questionnaire.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion was presented in the order the research questions that guided the study were organised.

### Research Question 1: What are the patterns of coverage of development news reports in the urban and rural areas of Bayelsa State?

Responses to research question one indicate that journalists and the mass media in Bayelsa State understand the importance of coverage of development news events and programmes in order to accelerate development in the urban and rural areas of State. This is evident from the weighted mean score of 3.2 obtained by item 1 of the questionnaire. However, the coverage of development news reports by journalists and the mass media in Bayelsa State significantly favours the urban areas of the State based on the weighted means score of 3.0 obtained by item 3 of the questionnaire. Many media stations in Bayelsa State did not have rural development news beats or correspondents who cover development news events and programmes in the rural areas of the State. This report is based on

the weighted mean scores of 1.6 and 1.7 obtained by items 2 and 4 of the questionnaire.

The appreciation of the importance of the mass media in accelerating the development of the society by journalists and the mass media in Bayelsa State buttresses the fact that mass media and journalists are integral in achieving a working society. Itule and Anderson (2008) state that the job of the mass media is to do the right thing in order to make the world a better place. Apart from serving as people's window to events in their immediate and larger environments, the mass media popularise social reality by according meaning to issues, people and circumstances. This is the thesis of the Media Functionalism theory, which conceives the human society as a system composed of interdependent parts with the mass media serving to maintain social stability by providing an accurate and supportive picture of the working society (Miller, 2006).

The place of the mass media in the maintenance of a working society is not only due to the regular functions of information dissemination, education and entertainment but also because the mass media are a potent force in the construction and displacement of social reality (Dominick, 2009; DeFleur, 2010). McQuail (2010), summarising the functions the mass media perform towards the maintenance of a working society states that the mass media perform the task of ensuring order, control, adaptation and change. The understanding of the importance of place of the mass media in the development of the wider society saddles journalists with the responsibility to accord priority to those issues and circumstances that engender positive change. It also means that development events and programmes in both rural and urban centres of a community must be correlated to encourage development strides in the populace.

### **Research Question 2: What are the major sources of development news to journalists in Bayelsa State?**

One of the steps to news reporting is the identification of news sources by journalists. In fact, journalists are encouraged to identify and establish rapport with news sources to ensure constant availability of information that is of interest to the public. The second objective of this study was to find out the major sources of development news reports to journalists in Bayelsa State. Responses to research question two indicate that the major sources of development news to journalists in the State were opinion leaders, community-based organisations, citizen journalists, ceremonies, festivals and traditional events. This report is based on the weighted means scores of 3.1, 2.9, 3.4 and 3.0 obtained by items 5,

6, 7 and 8 of the questionnaire. Responses to the same research question also indicate that journalists and the mass media in Bayelsa State obtain development news reports from other media stations in the State based on the weighted mean score of 2.9 obtained by item 10 of the questionnaire.

The identification of opinion leaders, community-based organisations, festivals and other traditional ceremonies as important sources of development news reports emphasises the importance of community media in facilitating social development. According to Anaeto and Anaeto (2010), the concept of community media does not only involve the establishment or location of a media station in a particular community but also the conscious application of the mainstream media to aid the development of the different communities that make up a society. What this projects is that apart from the establishment of community media stations, the coverage and reportage of community development strides by the conventional media can actually facilitate the development of communities and people in the rural and urban areas of a society.

The conscious application of the mass media to aid the development of rural and urban communities in a society has been described as a media adaptation process that can be facilitated through close collaboration between the mass media and community-based development partners-opinion leaders, social groups, faith-based organisations, etc (Oso, 2003). Onabanjo (2002) describes media adaptation as the conscious application of the mass media to serve the information and development needs of the different communities that make up a society. Udoakah (2004) shares this view as he maintains that rural reporting does not necessarily mean the location of a radio or television station in a community but the inclusion of community activities (especially those programmes or events that can encourage development efforts in the audience) in the programmes or contents of the mass media. Udoakah (2004) adds that the goal of community media is not essentially to ensure the ownership of a media station by a community but rather to facilitate the development of different communities that make up the society through mass communication.

### **Research Question 3: What are the challenges of development news reporting in the rural and urban areas of Bayesla State?**

Responses to this research question indicate that apart from the geographical terrain of Bayelsa State which makes it difficult to access several communities by road, most of the challenges to development news reporting in the State are directly related to media ownership interest. While the identification of geographical terrain as one of the challenges of development news reporting in

the rural and urban areas of Bayelsa State is based on the weighted mean score of 2.9 obtained by item 13 of the questionnaire, the identification of ownership interest as a constraint to development news reporting in rural and urban areas of the State is based on the weighted mean scores of 3.3, 3.0, 3.2 and 2.9, respectively obtained by items 15, 17, 18 and 20 of the questionnaire.

The negative impact of media ownership on news reporting gives expression to the plausibility of the gatekeeping function of the mass media. According to Ndimele and Innocent (2006), gatekeeping evaluates news reports to determine their relevance to the public. Gatekeeping ensures the dissemination of relevant information to a relevant audience. In development news reporting, gatekeeping ensures the dissemination of development news programmes that are beneficial to the audience as well as the dissemination of the development efforts of individual communities and groups to the wider society. Udoakah (2004) states that citizens' socio-political and economic conditions can be improved through the dissemination of knowledge. He adds that "knowledge of many things, including that of opportunities available can be got from the media" (p. 17).

Although, media ownership interest and the determination of news reports that are carried by a particular medium cannot be extricated. However, being the watchdog of the society saddles the mass media with the responsibility to be objective and fair in the presentation of reports. McQuail (2010) argues that the mass media, especially in evolving democracies or developing countries, should serve as the representative of the public, critic of the government, advocate of public policies and general watchdog. Ogunbiyi (2015) avers that being a watchdog of the society places a huge responsibility on the mass media in terms of objectivity and non-partisanship. What this means is that even though the mass media owner reserves the right to protect the interest of his business, reports that should endear the well-being of members of the public should not be undermined due to ownership or some sectional interest.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were made:

- Development news reporting by journalists in Bayelsa State favours the urban centres more than the rural areas. While development news reports in the urban areas of the state significantly attract the attention of journalists, development news events in the rural areas are grossly under-reported.
- Findings from the study revealed that the neglect of development news events and sources in the rural areas of Bayelsa state is not only due to the geographical terrain of the rural area but largely due to the interest



of media ownership. The management of many media stations in Bayelsa state do not have a deliberate editorial policy which encourages the coverage of development news reports in rural areas of the state.

- Arguably, one of the major constraints to effective development news reporting in the urban and rural areas of Bayelsa state was the interest of media ownership. Development news reporting by journalists in the state is strictly based on ownership interest and portends negative implications for dissemination of development information.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study proffered the following recommendations:

1. As part of their social responsibility and in keeping with ethical standard, journalists in Bayelsa State should strive to identify development news sources in the rural communities in the State by passionately upholding investigative journalism. Development news reports from such rural community sources can be disseminated through other channels of public communication (like the social media) other than the conventional channels whose reports are often determined or shaped by the desire to satisfy ownership or other parochial interests.
2. The government should endeavour to make rural communities in Bayelsa State more accessible through construction of roads and bridges across communities, especially communities on the islands. Linking the rural areas of Bayelsa State to the urban centres through roads will encourage more coverage of rural community events by journalists in the State.
3. The ownership of media stations in Bayelsa State should put public interest above personal or parochial concerns. The continual neglect of newsworthy events in the rural areas of the State will not only impede the rate of development of the rural communities, but the entire State. This is because whatever happens to the rural areas can also affect the urban centres.

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