# Enhancing the Sustainability of Community Media and Development through Citizen Journalism

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**Abstract**
*Community journalism brings about communication and development to the people at grass-root through a two-way communication flow. Community journalism provides opportunities for audiences to initiate communication as well as the right to participate as stakeholders. It also has the potential of providing both access by the community and participation for community members through which development could be promoted in the rural areas. This paper reviews related literature in order to highlight how the sustainability of community media and development could be enhanced through citizen journalism. Findings indicate that community media give voice to local concerns and serve as an alternative to national and commercial media that tend to ignore those concerns. It offers a forum for participation in national affairs and issues. Also, citizen journalism provides relevant information that is crucial to the development of societies as well as report events as they happen and facilitate sharing of opinions and ideas between people. It also encourages people to participate actively in community journalism through interaction and dialogue that often take a life of its own while enjoying the free-for-all social media platforms. Also, citizen journalism could highlight community problems within a short period and provide opportunity for people's voices to be heard in order to facilitate fast solutions to problems. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have contributed to the development of journalism practice especially citizen journalism worldwide. We now live in the information age where the ICTs have opened up new avenues for sharing and exchange of information knowledge or ideas without frontiers. However, there are issues of credibility and objectivity facing citizen journalism which need to be improved upon so as to make its reports more acceptable among the public.*

**Keywords**: Community Media, Sustainability, Development Communication, CitizenJournalism and ICTs.

## Introduction

The Asian Institute of Journalism defines community media as those media which are developed and managed by people sharing common values and aspirations in a small geographically defined area and which promote access and participation for development (Anaeto and Solo-Anaeto, 2010), Also, Onabajo (2002) explains that community media are adaptations of media for use by the community, for whatever purposes the community decides. They are media in which the community members participate as planners, producers and performers.

According to Oso (2005), the community media serve as the voice of the community, particularly promoting their interest in their own language and promoting a community in a dialogue with itself and outside world. Thus, community media provide opportunities for listeners/viewers/readers to initiate communications as well as the right to participate as stakeholders in each stage of programme planning, production, distribution and evaluation.

Community journalism is a form of broadcasting not for profit, owned and controlled by a particular community under an association, trust or foundation. In some cases, it is owned by non-governmental organizations working in communities and usually organized in such a way as to respond to the specific needs of the grass root communities (Alumuku, 2006). Thus, Community media are usually established to cater for the needs of the community members while its content originates from the local community and it is community-oriented, community specific and development oriented.

Citizen journalism is about being close or involved in events as they happen and transmitting them to a mass medium. Citizen journalism provides relevant information that is crucial to the development of societies. Through citizen journalism, people can share their opinions and ideas as well as participate actively in community journalism and development.

However, sustainability of community media is a challenge because it usually operates with a minimal staff and budget while the responsibility for management, programming and financing the station rests with the local community. Thus, citizen journalism has potential of boosting the human resource of a community medium. In its declaration of principles, the World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARE) points out that community media respond to the needs of the community it serves, contributing to its development within progressive perspectives in favour of social change. It also strives to democratic communication through community participation in different forms, in accordance with each specific context while journalism could serve as the oil which helps themachinery of community media to keep running without breaking down in order to facilitate development (Alumuku, 2006).

This is a review paper that highlights the community media options, functions, advantages and disadvantages as well as opportunity for people's participation especially through citizen journalism in order to enhance the sustainability of community media and development.

## Community Media and Community Development

Community communication aims at sensitization for social action. It also aims at local autonomy, culture and knowledge and the defense of localized, pluralistic grassroots action. The emphasis of community communication is participation (Kasoma, 2002).

Community development on the other hand is based on the idea that for development to be initiated and be sustainable, the people must see the need for development and take steps to actualize the process of development (Anaelo and Solo-Anaeto, 2010). Hence, community development is about the active involvement of community members in issues and problems that affect their lives.

The United Nations defines community development as the process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of the governmental authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of the community, to integrate these communities into the life of a nation and to enable them to contribute fully to national progress (Odedeji, 2003 cited in Anaeto and Solo-Anaeto, 2010).

Community development also involves creating awareness to help people of a community identify and assess their own needs and problems, teaching the people knowledge and skills to cope with the problems and instilling in them the determination to take actions to address their problems. According to Anaeto and Solo-Anaeto (2010) community development operates on the values of equality, participation, education and empowerment of community members. Community development is about the construction or reconstruction of the basic infrastructure necessary for the smooth functioning of a given community. It is the determination of members of a given community to identify and realize their own projects to their needs and interests (Alumuku, 2006).

Barrigan (1979) argues that communications media are the vehicles through winch practical participatory democracy might be applied. The media, when placed in the hands of the community might become the machinery through which participation in the socio-political sphere is achieved.

**Development Communication and Community Media**

Development is a desirable element in every society or community. Development communication is all about the planned use of communication to promote development within communities and enable members of such communities to accept changes. It is concerned with the dissemination of relevant information to increase people's knowledge to facilitate attitudes and value change and ensure the participation of people in the development process (Aneato and Solo-Aneato, 2010). Thus, the two major aspect of development communication is information dissemination and promoting the participation of people to make development possible in the community.

Community media provide both access and participation to members of the community. They inform and point out the reasons why certain development programmes are undertaken which can enhance development. Community media can contribute towards development through its considerable values of providing access and participation to the members of the community. These two factors can considerably facilitate and promote development in the community because they empower community members to have control over the communication systems in their communities. These factors also distinguish community media from commercial, public or private media especially due to their potentials of making development a reality in the communities they represent.

**Objectives of Community Media**

Alumuku (2006) points out that the community media aspire to achieve the ideal of making a local community a caring community and a better place to live in. As such, it has potential to increase the awareness among its audience to participate actively in their social, economic and cultural development. Other objectives include the promotion of local identity, character and culture, creating a diversity of voices and opinions, encouraging open dialogue and the democratic process. Others are encouraging the participation of all social and cultural groups and individuals in the community especially minority groups, promoting development and social change, promoting literacy, health and development as well as promoting missing communication services and providing diversity in ownership. Functions of Community Media

According to Anaeto and Solo-Anaeto (2010), the community media perform the following functions:

1. To facilitate the development of self-reliance, self-help and self-determination through the education of the rural people to reduce the level of illiteracy, enlightening them on development issues, motivating them to come up with solutions to problems, teaching them skills that they can use to better their situations and highlighting and reporting their problems, needs and suggest ways to tackle them.
2. Provide the forum for discussion of issues related to priority projects in the community. The media should serve as an avenue for them to be heard.
3. Provide the opportunity for sharing of experiences and insights as well as information requirements of carrying out projects.
4. To serve as an effective feedback, monitoring and control system for the community.
5. Mobilize the people for effective participation in the development process.
6. Harness the potentials in the local community for national development.
7. Serve as the voice of the community serving to articulate their interests in their own language.
8. Reports the achievements of the community.
9. Establish state and national contacts with organizations and movements.
10. Empower the community through the provision of relevant and meaningful information and interpretation of state and national development.
11. Support local groups in their attempt to make life meaningful.
12. Promote active participation in public affairs thus enhancing democratic culture and cultural integrity of the people.

**Opportunities for Access and Participation by Community Media**

In an international discussion in Belgrade in 1977, the following definitions of access and participation were accepted:-

**a) Access**

By definition, access infers the ability of the public to come closer to communication systems and in concrete terms. It can be related to two levels of choice and feedback.

At the level of choice, access include: -

i. The individual right to communication materials, the right to listen to orview desired programmes when a person wants, where he /she wants.
ii. The availability of a wider range of materials, the choice of which is madeby the public instead of being imposed by production organizations

iii. The transmission of materials requested by the public.

At the level of feedback, access implies:
i. The interaction between producers and receivers of messages.
ii. Direct participation by the audience during the transmission period
iii. The right to comment and criticize.
iv. Means of keeping in touch with producers, administrators and the managers of communication organization.

Thus, this highlights the relevance of audience in both access and feedback levels if they are required to participate in a communication process.

**b) Participation**

This implies the involvement of the public in production and in themanagement of communication systems. It also operates at different levels ofproduction, decision making and planning.

At the production level, participation implies:
i) Unrestricted opportunities for the public to produce programmes and tohave access to professional help,
ii) Making available to public technical facilities and production resources.

At the decision level, participation implies involvement of the public in:
i) Programming: content, duration and scheduling of programmes.
ii) The management, administration and financing of communication organizations.

Thus, this could empower people to participate in communication process especially through citizen journalism. At the planning level, participation comprises the right of the people to contribute to:
i) The formulation of plans and policies for communication enterprises,definition of objectives,principles of management and futureprogramming.
ii) The formulation of national, regional and local communication plans. This could enhance the sustainability of a community medium.

**b) Self-Management**

This is the most advanced form of participation. In this case, the public exercises the power of decision-making within communication enterprises, and are fully involved in the formulation of communication policies and plans.

According to Alumuku (2006) the community media is characterized, first of all by the active participation of the community in the whole process ofcreating news, information, entertainment and cultural programming, with an emphasis on local issues and concerns. The community can actively participate by contributing to the management of the station and having a say in the scheduling and content of the programmes especially through citizen journalism.

Secondly, as a non-profit enterprise, the community media should have responsibility to serve the community, not the advertiser. Since the community owns the station, the community also has a responsibility towards the ethical performance of the station.

Thirdly, community media programming is designed by the community to improve the social conditions and the quality of its cultural life. The community itself decides what its priorities and needs are in terms of information provision.

Community media is about the horizontal exchange of information - a participatory interaction between the community and the station rather than a vertical one way communication method (CIMA Report, 2007).

The Centre for International Media Assistance (CIMA) states that the most important aspects which participants emphasized include broad participation by community members - often on a volunteer basis and the ownership and control of the station by the community through a board that represents the community.

**Communication Media Options**

Community communication is not advocating the use of particular media and no hierarehy of media is implied. According to Berrigan (1979) the best community media are those which are available locally, which can be handled and operated by non-professionals, which enable ordinary people to participate in production and operation and which can be serviced and maintained locally. And of course, he adds, are the media which the project can afford.

Alumuku (2006) states that community broadcasting option challenges the former models of communication used by public service and commercial forms of broadcasting. According to him, earlier models of communication took for granted that communication was a linear, one way, process from sources to destinations. However, this one directional flow was considered inefficient for effective communication to take place.

Carey (1977) points to the alternative view of communication as a 'ritual' according to which communication is linked to such terms as sharing, participation, association, fellowship and the possession of *a*common faith.

This ritual, also known as communion, according to him, depends on shared understanding and emotions. It is celebratory, participatory and decorative rather than utilitarian in aim and it often requires some element of 'performance' for communication to be realized. This ritual or communion is suitable for community media due to its emphasis on horizontal interaction and participation.

However, the different media platforms have different strength, weakness, drawbacks, advantages, disadvantages and costs. An effective communication strategy usually uses a mix of at least 2 or 3 different types. The choice of media and format depends on your audience (s), budget, the communication channels best for your specific audience (s), how long the communication intervention will continue and how critical it is to encourage genuine participation for social change communication.

**Different Types of Communication Media**

There are various types of media which can be utilized effectively for community communication. These include Television, Radio, Newspapers, Websites / Internet and blogs, Mobile phones, Posters and Drama.

While television can reach many people and can be tailored to specific audience, it has high status perceived credibility, audio/visual presentation as well as help to generate interest, awareness and excitement. However, some of its setbacks include being expensive, availability/reach, programmes not always on at convenient time and no room for interaction unless linked to a TV call-in show

In the case of radio, it is relatively affordable, has wide reach, good for simple message slogan, and can help to generate interest, awareness and excitement among specific target audiences. Some of its disadvantages include audio only, no visual communication, no room for interaction and programmes not always on or at convenient time.

Newspaper on the other hand has little room for participation or input because it deals with literate public only, while it is perceived as high status medium which can be reviewed and re-read as needed. However, it generally requires literacy and its reach is not as deep reach as TV or Radio due to public reading apathy.

Although, Websites / Internet and Blogs require computer literacy, they have lots of potential for participation through blogging and specific websites can be set-up for particular audiences. Some advantages include global information can be obtained easily, it is a high status medium, list - serves can he quite inexpensive, can establish links to other sites and can establish pageson existing sites. It has some setbacks which include computers are needed, it may not be wide spread and list - serves and websites require someone to manage and facilitate them and provide content as well as technical assistance.

Mobile Phone has tremendous potential for two - way communication and one-on-one communication among public directly. It also provides timely and current information. However, it deals with specific publics. Some of its advantages include growing reach especially in rural areas, low cost for text messages and high popularity. Its disadvantages include text messages must be shorten, requires visual and written literacy and generally better for simple messages and slogans.

Poster has no potential for feedbacks. It can be used for general and specific audience (public). It requires visual and written literacy and generally better for simple message slogan. Drama on the other hand has lots of potential for participation, interaction, creating forum and can reach the target audiences and others. It can present sensitive issues in a humourous manner to avoid confrontations, highly interactive and uses local talent. Some of its setbacks include it has no permanent record unless videotaped and playback, it requires a team of people and actors and can be costly if actors are all paid.

Generally, according to Alumuku (2006) the community media have the following advantages:-

1. Individual stations can be set up with inexpensive equipment and housed in existing facilities. Concrete results could be felt quickly in the parts of the country where stations are set up.

2. Technically, community stations are relatively simple to set up and operate.
3. The low operating costs and grassroots nature of such stations give them a good chance of financial survival,
4. It gives a real voice to local concerns and is a true alternative to national and commercial media that tend to ignore those concerns. It offers a forum for participation in national affairs and issues.
5. Community media could provide an effective training ground for journalists, technicians and other personnel.
6. As they provide an obvious alternative to both the reality of the national or regional stations, it might be easier to get licenses for community stations as they cover a limited area and desire to democratize their services.

**Challenges in the Practice of Community Journalism**

Sustainability is a big challenge for community media. However, in somecountries, attempt to establish a station is a challenge either because there isno supportive legislature allowing it to operate freely or the excising laws are not properly implemented (CIMA, 2007). Alexander (2005) outlines the following as the challenges in the practice of community journalism: -

a) How to maintain independence and trustworthiness in the commercially-driven news environment.
b) How to report news fairly, yet not as on lookers, but as citizens and members of the political community.
c) How to seek after truth yet reporting with compassion and sensitivity, and
d) How to give due attention to the engagement of citizens in discourse while working within the pressuresof a commercial enterprise in which immediacy is a vital concern.

**Citizen Journalism**

Citizen or participatory journalism is the act of a citizen or group of citizens involved in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and other forms of information. The objective of this type of exercise is to provide independent, wide-ranging relevant information that is crucial to democratic societies (Corinue, 2012). Citizen journalism enables people without professional or formal journalism training have an opportunity to use the tools of modem technology and the almost limitless reach of the internet in order to create content that would otherwise not be revealed through conventional media, as this kind of journalism goes far beyond the reach of professional journalism.

Historically, access to news and information is only enjoyed by the privileged few in the society who tend to control the flow and direction of information through mass media ownership. This led to the sale of news as commercial product rather than a social commodity. Thus, citizen journalism evolved as a response to traditional media's neglect of public interest and partisan portrayal of news and world events through which audience are taken for granted (Adelabu, 2008). According to Peskin cited in Adelabu (2008) there are three ways to look at how society is informed:

1. That people are gullible and will read, listen to or watch just about everything
2. That most people require an informed intermediary to tell them what is good, important or meaningful and

3. That people are pretty smart, given the means, they can soil out for themselves and find their own version of the truth.

The emergence of citizen journalism demonstrates the third point where people are soiling out information with the help of the ICT and are participating in its dissemination.

According to Bamidele (2011) the advent of internet and multi-media technology has changed the pattern and flow of communication globally and it has impacted on journalism practice tremendously. Citizen journalism is viewed as an umbrella concept that covers blogging as well as other institutional practices that allows viewers to send in reports of events or activities in their location. It also includes any form of user-generated content or contribution to the on-going debate in the public sphere. These include posting on personal blogs or social networks such as Face book, Twitter and My space (Corinue, 2012).

Citizen journalism has democratized or liberalized journalism through its bottom-up approach with little or no editorial control. The importance of citizen journalism is its ability to fill the void created by traditional journalism's neglect of community-oriented news. It is built on participation of active members of the community. Citizen journalism advocates that the people are important in the cycle of news production and dissemination.

**Models of Citizen Journalism**

There are different models of citizen journalism according to Johnson and Wiedenbeck (2009). These are:

1. Readers commenting on already published articles.
2. Professional journalists posting a small story and then allowing citizens to post their experience that pertain to the story.
3. A stand-alone citizen site made up of contributions from citizens that is edited and is separate from the core news brand.

**ICT and Citizen Journalism**

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have contributed to the development of journalism practice worldwide. We now live in the information age where the ICTs have opened up new avenues for sharing and exchange of information knowledge or ideas without frontiers. New technology has made citizen journalism a reality and gave a wider cross-section of people an opportunity to participate in the dissemination of information (Corinue, 2012). The idea of news as conversation has helped give rise to citizen journalism websites, because it expands two-way communication between audience and media (Johnson and YViedcnbeck.2009).

Bamidele (2011) adds that citizen journalism actively encourage tree conversations among participants and enabled the audience to encode, distribute and decide information through simultaneous distributed conversations that either blossom or atrophy in the web's social network. Bamidele notes that conversation is the mechanism that turns the tables on the traditional roles of journalism and creates dynamic, egalitarian give-and-take. The fluidity of this approach puts more emphasis on the publishing of information rather than the filtering through editorial gate-keeping. Thus, conversation happens in the community for all to see through citizen journalism. Corinue (2012) opines that citizen journalism is more about interaction and it

is a dialogue that often takes a life of its own while enjoying the free-for-all social media platforms.

With today's technology, internet is the driving force or the wheel on which citizen journalism radiates. Anyone interested in this venture require only a digital camera or a mobile phone and a personal blog in some cases. And there is need for a citizen journalist to be connected to any of the social networks such as Face book, You Tube, My Space and Net Log among others (Ganiyu andAkinreti, 2011).

**Community Media and Citizen Journalism**

Citizen journalism is built on participation of active members of the news community. Citizen journalism provides opportunities for community media/journalism through its potential for emphasizing local community news and events and the promotion of active participation of community people in the production and dissemination of news. Citizen journalism is also an avenue for active participation of community people which is an essential ingredient for community media.

One of the greatest arguments for the relevance of citizen journalism is the ease with which citizen journalism get information across to the people. It is on record that on many instances, the mainstream media relied on citizen journalism to provide news and information to their audience. For instance the account of the 2004 tsunami that devastated South East Asia, the 2005 Hurricane Katrina in the US, the 2005 London underground bomb were all provided through citizen journalism where photos of the events were on websites and blogs and made their way to the mainstream media (Corinue, 2012) (Ganiyu and Akinreti, 2011).

Similarly, when foreign journalists were barred from reporting in Tehran during the 2009 upheaval over the country's presidential election, courageous citizens look it upon themselves to get information out to the international community. Also, the social media played a significant role in beaming the images of the earthquake that devastated Haiti. Likewise the upheavals in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Algeria and other parts of the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 became known as the Face book revolution. Even in Nigeria during crisis situation, people rely on the social media to get updates about a particular situation which goes a long way in enhancing security of lives and properties. This was one of the most interesting uses of citizen journalism to disseminate information and to give ideas to the traditional media who would develop such ideas to inform and educate.

**Conclusion**

Community media through citizen journalism can promote active participation among individuals in the community for development of the community as well as the sustainability of community media itself. Community media can indeed facilitate and promote development especially at the grass root level. While, citizen Journalism can provide lots of opportunities for community media such as promoting active participation and coverage of local community news and events. Also, community problems can be highlighted easily by providing opportunity for people's voices to be heard. However, there are issues of credibility and objectivity facing citizen journalism which need to be improved upon (Johnson and Wiedenbeck, 2009).

Despite the credibility concerns, citizen journalism serves as an important avenue of highlighting community problems and issues as well as providing firsthand account of events. Thus, they can effectively sustain community media and development through active participation of community members and contributing to the execution of the development programmes according to the needs and interest of the community.

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