

Press Coverage of Rural Development News: An Analytical Study of Nigerian Compass and The Hope Newspapers

Owoeye David Kolawole¹

Abstract

This study investigates the extent and nature of press coverage of rural development news in Nigeria, using Nigeria Compass and The Hope newspapers as case studies. Anchored on the Development Media Theory, Social Responsibility Theory, and the framework of Development Journalism, the research adopts a content analytical method to evaluate how these newspapers report rural development news. A total of 48 editions—24 from each newspaper—were sampled using a simple random sampling technique, selecting two editions per month over a one-year period from May 2011 to April 2012. Data were presented using tables to highlight frequencies and trends in coverage. Out of the 730 editions published during the period under review, the selected sample provides insight into the consistency, prominence, and thematic focus of rural development news. Tables was used to illustrate findings. It was discovered that the two selected newspapers did not give much prominence to coverage of rural development news rather they preferred world and city news. The findings revealed that The Hope Newspaper report and publish more stories on the rural communities than the Nigerian Compass within the period under review. It is also revealing that news reported about rural development news was mostly in straight news format as the Nigerian Compass published while few reports were published as features, opinion/comment, letter-to-the-editor, photographs and cartoons. There was no report on editorial. This was due to the fact that Nigerian Compass write editorial on national issues and foreign matters as against rural and communities' issues, as part of recommendations, imbalance of flow of communication between rural communities and urban areas can be bridged if government, donor agencies and development agencies should decentralize the practice of journalism by establishing rural/community newspapers so that their voices would be heard by the government.

Keywords: Press, Coverage, Rural Development, News, Nigerian Compass, The Hope Newspapers

¹ Department of Mass Communication, Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, P.M.B 1019, Owo, Ondo State – Nigeria

Introduction

There is no doubt that there is a communication gap, not only among nations but also between the rural and urban areas of many Third World Nations. Some describe the situation as information imbalance; others call it one-way traffic flow of information. The lopsidedness in the communication process handicaps rural and national development. According to Opubar and Nwuneli, "Some of the most urgent human problems that need to be solved concern the creation of equitable systems of information distribution so that individuals, groups and nations are enabled to communicate and be communicated with, as equal.

It has been noted that almost 80 percent (80%) of the country's population quarters in rural communities, but nonetheless marginalized, neglected, as it were, from the mainstream of socio-political and economic development activities. In many developing countries, the rural dwellers constitute a larger part of the population. In Nigeria, it is about 70 - 80 percent of the entire population. Yet, they seem to have been relegated to the background by the government and the mass media alike (Anaeto, 2005).

Rural development news, according to Onabayo (2002) cited in (Anaeto, 2005), entails intentions aimed at improved productivity, increased employment/incomes for the target groups, as well as minimum acceptable level of food, shelter, education, health and housing. In approach to rural development in Nigeria, Kamath (2005) said that development reporting must concern itself with the people. It must show them how to improve their bargaining power with society. Development reporting must describe the people actually at work in news projects and modernization, the news discoveries and the products. According to him, development reporting, to be effective, requires considerable investigative and research skill on the part of the journalists, apart from firm grasp of trends in economics thought planning and development.

Kamath also pointed out the majority of rural dwellers are relatively live in poverty, there are a few who live in relative affluence. He mentioned few of occupants of rural areas to include: drivers, poultry farmers, teachers in primary and secondary schools and health workers in communities that have health centers. Consequently, our rural areas have been seen as "good for nothing" for the media package, hence, the need for negligence.

Approach to rural development by the government in Nigeria dates back to when Nigeria was under colonial rule. In the Journal “Rural Infrastructural Development in Nigeria: Between 1960 and 1990 problems and challenges”, Olayiwola and Adeleye, divided the period of rural development in Nigeria into two namely: Pre-independence period and Post-independence period.

Government involvement in infrastructural provision for rural development began as far back as 1917. The colonial government promulgated the township ordinance in which the settlements in the country were classified into three (3) namely: First class township, second class township and Third-class township.

The first-class township harbored the whites and their workers. At such, there was heavy concentration of infrastructure in these settlements for examples, Lagos and Onitsha. The second and third townships received little or no facilities. This trend continued until 1952 when the local government councils were established in Western Nigeria. The local government councils were seen as avenues through which infrastructural facilities could be extended to the rural areas but unfortunately, the funds allocated to the local government councils were not enough to maintain facilities in the council’s headquarters.

Despite the crucial role of rural development in Nigeria’s economic growth and poverty reduction, there is a dearth research on how the press covers rural development news. This study aims to investigate the press coverage of rural development news in Nigeria, with a focus on the Nigerian Compass and The Hope Newspapers. Specifically, the study seeks to analyze the extent, nature and tone of rural development news coverage in the news coverage in those newspapers, and explore the implication for promoting rural development in Nigeria.

Anaeto, (2008) said the failure of transform the rural areas, where the vast majority of our people live in terms of productive capacity, income level and quality of life, will be tantamount to retrogression as he highlighted five consequences.

The major Nigerian Mass Media (Radio, Television, Newspapers, and Magazines) have a vital role to play in carrying developmental news of the areas. Due to the influence that they have functions to inform, educate, entertain and mobilize people for development of the area. It has been noticed that practically Nigerian newspapers that enjoy wide geographical circulation are run and managed in urban

areas and at such give fair treatment in their reportage about urban developments, the educated and give less or not at all, recognition to ruralists. Therefore, the research wants to examine whether the Nigerian Compass and The Hope Newspapers actually report news of rural communities.

This study will contribute to our understanding of role of the press in promoting rural development in Nigeria, and provide insights for policymakers, journalists and development practitioners on how to improve the coverage of rural development issues in the media.

Review of the Literature

❖ The Concept of Development

The definition of development has not been ascertained among the scholars. The reason is that any definition given to development will, by no means has political and ideological colorations. Walter Rodney, cited in (Udoahah, 1998), sees development as a many-sided process in which individual well-being is the ultimate goal at the level of the individual, the achievement of which is very much tied to the state of society as a whole.

However, development is a multifaceted reality. Although it is viewed from different angles (social, political, economic), development means one thing to all people “a change for the better; a quality of life”. According to Young (1993) cited in Soola (2002), put it thus;

“Development implies a change for the better; the ordering of society, social and economic processes in such a way as to lead to the eradication of gross poverty, ill-health, and illiteracy and to rising standards of living and increased material comforts for all”.

These definitions suggest that true development affects citizens’ welfare positively and ensures that all citizens have a voice in decision-making process. In essence, development enhances an individual’s social opportunities, political freedom and economic security. The possible sets of indicators of development are health, mortality, education, welfare, equality, political freedom and economic security. More importantly, development can be achieved through a deliberately planned, organized and directed communication.

Akinleye, in Soola (2002) describes development as a power of the people to solve their own problem with their own wisdom, experiences and resources with a view to eliminating poverty, pestilence and starvation. Adebayo has consistently emphasized the need for development practitioners to give preeminence to the concept of human development in his view:

Human development is the process of increasing knowledge, skills and capacities of all the people in any society.... capacity to the face the future, master the probable and manage the unpredictable (Adebayo, 1998) in Soola (2002).

Development communication therefore, consists of information about government plans and effects to improve the standard of living of the populace; appeals to citizens to adopts new ideas and ways of doing things; news of struggles for a better living and news of achievements to spur or inspire the citizenry appeals from government to citizens for cooperation and threats of force or punishment in the event of non-compliance.

There is no doubt that development communication is all out for development in all its ramifications. It is result oriented – Development communication is a phenomenon practiced only in the developing countries but it has gained scholarship in universities in the West and his proved a fertile area for academic encounters.

The press as one of the contemporary mass media can help foster rural development by passing information that would both be beneficial to the government and rural populace in term of providing access to a wide variety of people, determining the people's need for development, and programming for those needs.

❖ News Coverage

Nobody has yet come up with a positive, universal definition of news, but we have a lot of journalism principles that can be examined and put together to answer the question. Duyile (2005) defines news as “any printable story which, in the opinion of the Editor, will interest the readers of his papers”. News is anything that has just happened which attracts the interest of the people. It is a current or fresh knowledge about an event that is gathered, processed and disseminated through a medium to a large number of interested people (Ogundowole et al.,).

❖ Types of News

It is sometimes, difficult to be able to categories news stories because the characteristics of one type of story may be found in another type. However, news stories, especially those published by most national and commercial print media (newspaper and magazine can be generally categorized as follows):

Straightforward News Story: Majority of the stories published by our commercial newspapers are straight forwarded stories. This is as a result of the usual routine reporting i.e. straight-jacket-reporting, reporting the new straight, and the way it is: no interpretation, no editorialization. There is neither addition nor subtraction of the facts of the story. No padding, no shading of weight or wedding.

Hard News: Hard news deals mostly with numerous figures, data, facts and other information that require deep thinking. Such stories on government, economic, social and political politics, e.g. annual budgets, election, census, house debates, etc., all qualify as hard news. Because they are usually laden with so many figures and facts, they may be boring to the readers if not skillfully written.

Soft News: These are stories on ceremonial activities or social engagements. Stories on wedding ceremonies, burial, birthday celebration, naming, opening of new houses, hotels, schools etc. are all soft news. They are meant to promote such event. They are usually written flamboyantly with lots of adjectives.

Human Interest News Stories: These are meant to arouse human feelings and to evoke people's emotions. Account of conflict, crime, disaster, accident adventure, achievement, children and animal, etc. fall under human-interest stories.

Investigate News Stories: To investigate is to find out, to discover what is not previously known, to dig out the facts. Writing an investigative news story requires digging out the facts. Investigative reporting means digging out the facts and tying up the loose ends.

Interpretative News Stories: Interpretative reporting gives meaning and perspective to the news story. The reporter analysis and interprets the facts of the matter to let the reader know the possible implication of such reports especially on controversial or volatile issues such as incessant increases in fuel price, inconsistent policies.

In-depth News Report: These stories require creative thinking and imagination on the part of the reporter. Usually, written after a major newsbreak such as any detailed story, for example, on the novel escape of Chief D.S.P Alamiesagha (Ogundowole et al., 1995).

All these types of news above are account of recent occurrence as reported in a news media. Qualities of good news include: timeliness, oddity, proximity, conflict, consequence and prominence. News story is an account of recent occurrence as reported by journalist in mass media.

❖ **Rural Area Social Structure in Nigeria in the 1960s**

About 70 percent of all Nigerians were still living in farming villages in 1990s, although the rural dwellers formed a shrinking proportion of later force. It was among these people that ways of life remained deeply consistent with the past people lived in small, modest households whose member formed, sold some cash crops and performed various kinds of non-farm work for cash income. With the steady declining of export crop price since the 1960s and the price rise in locally grown foods after the early 1970s, farmers shifted from export crops to local foods for their own.

❖ **News Coverage for Rural Areas**

On how news coverage has to do with rural areas, Kamath, asked questions that should the term development necessarily have to do with the economic betterment of the people? Shouldn't the fact that people living in India's villages are not getting justice and are living in India's villages are not getting justice are living frequency under the tyranny of the rich and the powerful, also be a part of development reporting?

In a scathing article in *Mainstream* (March 1, 1980), Mr. Mankehar raised the issue of justice in rural India and the role of the media.

"The lifting of the rock by the shocking Narainpur and Gaya incidents revealed under them writing swarms of deadly germs, which indicated that there are many rocks all over, particularly in benighted Bihar and Up, shielding organized criminality, flourishing in the countryside with impunity, all along, in the last three decades."

As we all know, that which is not reported does not exist. And crime unreported is crime licensed and encouraged. And we also know too well that when lawlessness and crime go unreported, the law and order authorities and government feel that they could get away with it and therefore they could afford to do nothing about it why is such a scandalous state of affairs possible? Because in Indian, press has failed in its duty-its duty not only to lift the rock and expose worms but to cleanse the grounds under the rocks by focusing light on them.

Even if the metaphors are somewhat mixed here, the main thrust of mankekar's argument is clear: rural reporting is poor, halting and often non-existent. The poor, the argument probably goes, do not make news for the urban elite. In a sense, it is very hard to define "development reporting" unless one is willing to settle for the narrowest of meanings. Development brings in its wake multitude of problems. Shouldn't they be part of development reporting? The problem of pollution, for example, or the problem of displacement of a larger of people from natural habitat as and when if proposed to build a dam. The issue was raised Bharat Dogram in an article on Hydel projects, Environment and people (August, 1980).

❖ **Need to Report Rural Areas**

Every country has its national goals. One of such goals is always the welfare of its citizens and this has its not in Human Rights. Udoakah, (1998) Reporting the rural areas serve as a barometer for gauging achievement in the areas of citizens' welfare, since it is there that the majority of the population is found C.M. Case citing Warham, 1970 in Udoakah (1998) has noted that a social condition can be seen but it becomes a problem only if the social mind sees it as such. He further stressed that media reports on rural areas will confer a social problem status on the rural condition through their analysis of the effects of the continuation of rural condition on society, and educates the social mind to see it as constituting a problem. According to Warham (1970) in Udoakah noted that when he said, "*It would not be difficult in any society to find examples of situation which individuals may deplore, but which continues to exist as condition because no sufficient influential groups in that society are aware of them as problems*".

❖ **Functions of the Press**

The press, namely newspapers, magazine, radio and television are powerful, although not unlimitedly so. Journalists can build as well as destroy. They can moderate society or restrain it. Daramola (2005) a number of scholars have

propounded what can be called conceptual functions of mass communication. One of such scholars, as Daramola posited, Fredrick C. Whitney has this to say about press functions:

- It informs that is, it keeps one-up-to-date
- It educates that is, it broadens and deepens one's perceptive
- It persuades that is, it sells goods and services, political candidates and opinions
- It entertains that is, it creates laughter, fills a void. It costs money and it makes money and it makes money.

Lasswell (1948) in Daramola (2003) identifies three functions of mass communication. These three functions are:

- Surveillance of the environment (policing and alerting members of a community to dangers and opportunities in the environment).
- Correlation of parts of society in responding to the environment.
- Transmission of the social heritage from one generation to the next.

The functions are explained thus:

Surveillance: The word surveillance means keeping close watch over someone or something. The act of carefully watching a person suspected to a crime. In the context of mass communication, surveillance means that the first function of the mass media is to inform and provide information to the society and keep watch on the activities of the government and correct uncomplimentary occurrences. In other words, the mass media perform similar function with the police by policing the entire society. This press function is also known as "Watchman function".

Correlation: This second function of the press refers to the interpretation of information about events in the environment any giving prescription for action in response to these events. This is the editorial or opinion function of mass communication. Lasswell (1948) in Daramola (2003) says editors; journalists and speakers whom he called correlators best perform this role.

❖ **Transmission of Cultural Heritage**

This focuses on the communication of knowledge, values and social norms from one generation to another or from member of a group to newcomers. This is the education function of mass communication.

Entertainment: An important function of mass communication is entertainment. This includes communicative acts primarily intended for amusement, irrespective of forms.

Persuasion: This is concerned with persuading and convincing its receivers through reasoning and argument. There are many ways of persuading people. Entertaining comedy, drama and features stories can all be used over the time to persuade and convert the people.

Education: Education function is meant to teach the people by imparting knowledge with a view to broaden the horizon of the people and develop them mentally, morally, manually and mechanically. When people are sound, they are able to think critically and analytically about issue before them.

Information: This is the first and primary function of communication. Giving information is creating awareness on the part of the people. The mass media provide information to the entire society on daily basis.

Selling (Advertising): The message is meant to induce or stimulate the receiver to by a particular product or the best brand.

Interpretation: News carried by the media are further interpreted and analyzed in form of news commentary, editorials and features.

Advantages of Newspapers as a Veritable Tool for Rural Development

Daramola (2003) states that newspapers owe their origin to three major factors – the people's desire to know about: themselves, their government and economy. As a result, newspaper covers such areas as sports, crimes, science, politics, arts, disasters, children and special events of human interest in order to keep people informed of happening in their environment.

The greatest advantage of newspapers over other news media like television, radio and magazine is that newspapers can cover more news in greater detail than television and radio newscasts.

❖ Roles of Mass Media in Rural Development

The all-powerful direct media effect has had to give way to an indirect, mediated impact of the media. Roger had, in 1976, as cited in Soola (2002) recognized that the effects of communication are mediated by social structure, interpersonal networks, accessibility of communication hardware and software, as well as by the quality of media messages.

Mass mobilization is the wakening or activated of the dormant consciousness of a greater number of people with the use of new ideas for the purpose of gaining their support for an action in inaction; it is a process of creating new loyalties using new ideas and appeals to reason and sentiment at appropriate times.

However, mass media should be serving as mass mobilization for rural development. On how mass media can serve as mobilization tool for rural development in Nigeria, the directorate for social mobilization at Abuja in 1987, Admiral Augustus Aikhomu, a former Chief of General Staff and later Vice President said:

“The goal of social mobilization (in Nigeria) is the creation of a new cultural and productive environment which will promote pride in productive work, self-reliance, self-discipline and selfless discharge of obligation for the greatness of the nation”.

The functions of mass media can essentially exercise in publicity. A publicity outfit and to be used for this publicity were the media of mass information. Udoakah (1998).

In line with our concept of local rural organization as the bedrock of development in traditional societies, group or community media can be used to facilitate participatory development. This it does, according to Ramirez (1987) in Soola (2002) in three principal ways: as a means, an approach and as a process. As a means for small group to develop a critical attitude towards the reality of self, the group, community and society through participation in group interaction.

- An approach, group media has helped marginal groups to speak to one another to articulate their thoughts and feelings
- A process, it has been successful in community organization. FAO (1994) in Soola (2002) enunciated seven significant roles that communication can be called upon to play in participatory development process. It can be used for:

- Better planning and program formulation by consulting the people and activity involving them in making decisions that will affect them;
- People's participation and community mobilization by building their confidence to make decision and carry them out as a community in a self-reliant way,
- Changing lifestyles through the use of mass media to raise awareness, peer counseling technique of interpersonal communication and social communication methods to pioneer attitudinal change;
- Improved training through communication media to bring alive new ideas and techniques and energies programs of training and human resources development;
- Rapid spread of information far and wide throughout a region or an entire country through the mass media. Effective management and coordination, communication approaches are crucial when a new development orientation is being introduced within a ministry, when strengthened teamwork is needed and policy makers need to be kept abreast of the field situation; gaining the attention of decision makers and generating their support.

Theoretical Framework

Wilbur Schramm (1963) describes theory as “a crop-detector” which enables us to separate scientific statement from unscientific ones. Denis McQuail (1989) in Folarin says a theory consists of a set of ideas of varying status and origin which seek to explain or interpret some phenomenon.

According to Earl Babbie statements, relating different aspects of some phenomenon. Theory is one of the goals of any intellectual discipline. Daramola (2003) defines theory as a systematic and deductive way of thinking about reality in order to describe and understand such reality. “Theory is a statement of prediction or a symbolic construction based on individual's view point about an aspect of reality”. He further states that a theory is a set of ideas, which provides an explanation for something.

Kerlinger (1973) in Daramola (2003) sees theory as “A set of interrelated constructs, definition and proposition that give a systematic view about phenomena”. To interpret this research study, theories such as Development Media Theory, Social Responsibility Media Theory and Development Journalism would be reviewed.

❖ **Development Media Theory**

The development media theory according to Daramola (2003) was put forward as a means of paying for the imbalance in the development and information flow of the Third World Countries and a solution to the technological problems facing them the third world countries are beset by problems that make the development of mass communication system difficult.

❖ **Social Responsibility Media Theory**

The social responsibility theory arose out of the criticism of libertarian theory of the press. Daramola (2005) one of the defects of libertarian theory to the press is its inability to prescribe viable standards for the day-to-day operations of the mass media and failure to provide a stable formula, “to distinguish between liberty and abuse of liberty” (Fred S. Siebert as cited by Egbon, 1995) in Daramola (2005).

❖ **Development Journalism**

The concept of development journalism emanated from efforts by scholars from developing countries to “cut the umbilical cord” that had tied them to western communities since it had been discovered that western models of journalism and of journalism-related scholarship were not in fact transferable to developing countries (Folarin, 1998).

The term; “development journalism” which demands that news reporting be constructive, and general towards development ends. It argues that development journalism should be a long-term development processes rather than on day-to-day news (Traber 1985) in Folarin (1998).

Methodology

This study seeks to evaluate the extent, to which the rural communities are reported by the Nigerian press using one National Newspaper and one Regional Newspaper, “The Nigerian Compass and The Hope Newspaper”. In a bid to answer the research question below, the content analysis design was adopted to find out answers to the research question revised in the study.

❖ **Study Population**

The Nigerian Compass and The Hope Newspapers would be used for this study. The newspapers editions from the period of May 2010 to April 2011 (1 year) would be analyzed giving a total of 730 editions. The two newspapers, Nigerian Compass and The Hope Newspapers were purposively chosen because they are both national newspapers.

❖ **Sample Technique**

Two issues/editions per month were selected for a period of one year beginning from May 1st 2010 to April 30, 2011. Twenty-four (24) editions per newspapers were content analyzed giving a total of 48 editions as the sample.

❖ **Categories of Analysis**

For this study, the categories of analysis of the content of the Newspapers are types, prominence and slant.

❖ **Method of Data Analysis**

Statistical tables and simple percentages would be used to analyze the data gathered. The data would be presented in tables according to frequency event of occurrence of units in each category adopted.

Data Analysis and Result

❖ **Result**

As earlier said that this study is aiming to evaluate the way and form in which the rural communities are reported in the Nigeria Compass and the Hope Newspapers. To carry out the study, two editors per month were selected for each newspaper. Thus, twenty-four (24) editions per newspaper were sampled and content analyzed for the period of one year, giving a total of forty-eight (48) edition as the sample.

The units of analysis in the study were news, features, letters-to-the-editor, opinion/comment, photographs news and cartoons pertinent to rural communities as covered by the Nigeria Compass and the Hope Newspapers.

The categories of analysis were: Types which includes political news, agriculture/business news, educational and literacy news, health news, human interest/Arts/Culture news, crime/disaster news, sport news, development project news, religion news, entertainment news and interview news.

Prominence includes reports on position, columns and space (inches) allotted to pictorial news and slant which includes letter-to-the-editor and opinion and comments.

Research Question 1: How do the Nigerian Compass and the Hope Newspapers report the rural development news?

This question has to do with how far the Nigerian Compass and the Hope Newspapers report or carry news coming from rural communities. The research questions would be best answered by using two of the following approaches:

Frequency of coverage of rural stories

❖ Frequency of forms of coverage

However, forms include the style or form in which the news was reported.

Table 1: Distribution of Stories according to the frequency of coverage

Newspapers	No of Stories	Percentage (%)
Nigerian Compass	174	47
The Hope	196	53
Total	370	100%

Table 1 above shows that Nigerian Compass presented 176 representing 47% stories about the rural communities while The Hope, as shown in the table, published 196 representing 53% about the rural communities within the period of the study. The reason why Nigerian Compass has less rural communities' reportage may due to the fact that it is a city-based newspaper, which devoted most of its news to national stories and foreign news. But for the Hope newspaper, which has higher figure of rural/communities' news reportage, as observed by the researcher devotes largely its pages to rural communities' news. As matter of fact, the Hope has pages for rural/communities news stories three times in a week whereas, in Nigeria Compass rural community's news stories have pages from Monday to Friday, as observed, but most of the news in this page might not real rural news.

Table 2: Distribution of Reports according to forms

Forms	The Nigerian Compass	The Hope
Features	15 (8.6%)	37 (18.9%)
Editorials	0	3 (1.5%)
Opinion/Comment	7 (4%)	11 (5.6%)
Letters-to-the-editor	6 (3.4%)	4 (2.0%)
News straights	92 (53%)	104 (53.1%)
Photographs	43 (24.7%)	35 (17.9%)
Cartoons	11 (6.3%)	2 (1.0%)
Total	174 (100%)	196 (100%)

The above table depict that out of 174 stories reported in the Nigerian Compass, 15 stories representing 8.6% were features, 7 stories representing 4% were opinion/comments, 6 stories representing 3.4% were letters-to-the-editor, 92 stories representing 53% were straight news, 43 stories representing 24.7% were photographs and 11 stories representing 6.3% were cartoons. There was no coverage on editorials. Likewise, the Hope Newspaper, out of 196 stories reported, 37 stories representing 18.9% were features, 3 stories representing 1.5% were editorial, 11 stories representing 5.6% were opinion/comments, 4 stories representing 2.0% were letters-to-the-editors, 104 stories representing 53.1% were news straights, 35 stories representing 17.9% were photographs, 2 stories representing 1.0% were cartoons. This shows that in the distribution of rural stories into different forms, news straights had highest frequency of 92 stories representing 53% in the Nigerian Compass. Similarly, in The Hope News straights report has the highest frequency of 106 representing 63.1%. This happens because news items are mostly published and they come in short forms.

Research Question 2: Type(s) of news about rural communities have the highest reportage in the Nigerian Compass and The Hope Newspapers.

This research question would be answered using two approaches:

- i. Types of news reported
- ii. Slant of reporting them

Table 3: Distribution of the types of rural news

Types	The Nigerian Compass	The Hope
Political	21 (12.0%)	17 (8.7%)
Agriculture/business	17 (10%)	23 (11.7%)
Education literacy	11 (6.3%)	20 (10.2%)
Health	5 (3%)	0
Human interest/arts/culture	21 (12.0%)	17 (8.7%)
Crime/disaster	60 (34.4%)	18 (9.2%)
Sports	0	15 (7.7%)
Development project	37 (21.2%)	66 (33.7%)
Religion	0	10 (5.1%)
Entertainment	0	8 (4.0%)
Interview	2 (1.1%)	2 (1.0)
Total	174 (100%)	196 (100%)

The above table reveals that the two newspapers; The Nigerian Compass and The Hope were found to publish rural news in the area of political, agriculture/business, education/literacy, health, human interest/arts/culture, crime/disaster, sports, development projects, religious, entertainment and interview.

Furthermore, the table also reveals that the Nigerian Compass reported 21 stories representing 12.0%. On political, 17 stories representing 10% on agriculture/business, 11 stories representing 6.3% on education/literacy, 5 stories representing 3% on health, 21 stories representing 12.0% on human interest/arts/cultures, 60 stories representing 34.4% on crime/disaster, 37 stories representing 21.2% on development projects and 2 stories representing 1.1% on interview. There is no coverage on sports, religion and entertainment.

The analysis above shows that the Nigerian Compass has highest report on crime and disaster with frequency 60 stories representing 34.4% while development project news with frequency 21 representing 12.0% came second and political news and human interest/arts/culture with frequency 21 stories each representing 12.0% and 12.0% respectively came third. Interview news has lowest frequency with 2 news

representing 1.1%. Sports, religion and entertainment news have no reports on the Nigerian Compass observed by the researcher.

Similarly, in The Hope, 17 stories representing 8.7% were reported on politics, 23 stories representing 4.7% were reported on agriculture/business, 20 stories representing 10.2% were reported on education and literacy, 17 stories representing 8.7% were reported on human interest/arts/culture, 18 stories representing 9.2% were reported on crime and disaster, 15 stories representing 7.7% were reported on sports, 66 stories representing 33.7% were reported on development project, 10 stories representing 5.1% were reported on religion, 8 stories representing 4.0% were reported on entertainment, 2 stories representing 1.0% were reported on interview. But health has no coverage in The Hope Newspaper as observed by the researcher. It can also be further explained that development project news with 66 stories representing 33.7% has highest coverage followed by agriculture and business news with frequency 23 representing 11.7%. As in the Nigerian Compass, interview stories with frequency 2 representing 1.0% has lowest.

Research Question 3: What is the level of prominence given to various news stories?

The research question would be answered using:

- i. Position
- ii. Space

Position here would be determined by the page placements. That is, front page reports are considered as most important, back page reports are next in importance while inside page stories are least in importance.

Table 4: Distribution of reports according to position

Position	The Nigerian Compass	The Hope
Front page	5 (2.9%)	18 (9.2%)
Inside page	169 (97.1%)	178 (90.8%)
Back page	0	0
Total	174 (100%)	196 (100%)

The table above depict that in Nigerian Compass, 169 stories representing 97.1% were published on the inside page with 5 reports representing 2.9% were on the front page. The Hope has 178 reports representing 90.8% on the inside page, 18 reports representing 9.2% were on the front page. There is no report on the back page of both Nigerian Compass and The Hope Newspapers. The analysis, as demonstrated in the above table, reveals that The Nigerian Compass did not give much prominence to rural communities' news stories. This could be seen in its front page which gives 5 reports representing 2.9% and none reports on its back pages. Most of its reports are in inside page. Also, The Hope did not attach much importance to rural communities' news. It has 18 stories representing 9.2% on the front page, no report on back page while it has 178 stories representing 90.8% in inside page.

As mentioned earlier, the researcher also sought to find out the space allotted to the reports. This would be determined by the number of column and paragraphs allotted to the reports as reported by Nigerian Compass and The Hope. However, reports in columns 5-6 are the most important; columns 3-4 are next in importance while columns 1-2 are least n importance. Pictorial news would be measured by inches. Stories in 5-8 inches would be considered as most important while stories in 1-4 inches would be counted least important. Also, stories in 11 and above paragraphs would be counted most important, reports in 5-10 would be considered next in importance while reports in 1-4 paragraph would be counted least important.

Table 5: Distribution of reports in columns

Columns	The Nigerian Compass	The Hope
1-2	52 (29.9%)	72 (36.7%)
3-4	85 (48.9%)	64 (32.7%)
5 -6	37 (21.2%)	60 (30.6%)
Total	174 (100%)	196 (100%)

The table above indicated that the Nigerian Compass reports 52 stories representing 29.9% in 1-2 columns, 85 reports representing 48.9% in 3-4 columns while 37 reports representing 21.2% were on 5-6 columns. The Hope published 72 reports representing 36.7% in 1-2 columns, 64 reports representing 32.7% in 3-4 columns while 60 reports representing 30.6% were published in 5-6 columns. This analysis

above further reveals that the Nigerian Compass did not attach much importance and prominence to rural stories as majority of the reports, 85 representing 48.9% were in 3-4 columns, which is considered in this researcher work as next in importance while 53 reports representing 29.9% were reported in 1-2 columns which is considered as least important in this research as most important.

Congruently, The Hope did not attach much importance to rural reports as 72 reports representing 36.7% were reported in 1-2 columns, 64 stories representing 32.7% were in 3-4 columns while 60 reports representing 30.6% were reported in 5-6 columns which is considered as most important.

Table 6: Space (Inches) allotted to Pictorial News

Inches	The Nigerian Compass	The Hope
1-4	15 (100%)	21 (100%)
5-8	-	-
Total	15 (100%)	21 (100%)

The above table shows that 1-4 inches were devoted to 15 pictures representing 100%, reported by Nigerian Compass. The Hope has 21 reports representing 100% in 1-4 inches. There is no report in 5-8 inches of both the Nigerian Compass and The Hope Newspapers. The analysis above could be further explained that Nigerian Compass did not allot space (inches) to pictorial news of rural areas. This could be seen in the above table where 5-8 inches has no report in both newspapers that is considered as most important.

Table 7: Distribution of Stories according to number of paragraphs

Paragraphs	The Nigerian Compass	The Hope
1-4	56 (32.2%)	50 (25.5%)
5-10	82 (47.1%)	84 (42.9%)
11 & above	36 (20.7%)	62 (31.6%)
Total	174 (100%)	196 (100%)

Table 7 above reveal that in Nigerian Compass, 56 reports representing 32.2% were in 1-4 paragraphs, 82 reports representing 47.5% were in 5-10 paragraphs and 36 reports representing 20.7% were in 11 and above. In The Hope, 50 reports representing 25.5% were in 1-4 paragraphs, 84 reports representing 42.9% were in 5-10 paragraphs and 62 representing 31.6% were in 11 and above.

Furthermore, The Nigerian Compass did not attach much prominence to the rural reports as majority of its paragraphs (rural news) were in 5-10 paragraphs, which is considered as next in importance after 11 and above paragraphs. However, in The Hope, 50 reports representing 25.5% were in 1-4 paragraphs which is considered as least important, 84 reports representing 42.9% were in 5-10 paragraphs, which is counted as more important and 63 reports representing 31.6% were in 11 and above, which is considered as most important. It could be however, concluded here that Nigerian Compass and The Hope Newspapers did not devote most of their pages to rural news stories.

Research Question 4: Do the Nigerian Compass and the Hope Newspaper permit opinions or views about the rural communities to be published in their dailies?

To answer this research question, the researcher sought to know if The Nigerian Compass and The Hope do publish opinion/comments on rural communities as well as letters written to the editor by the rural dwellers in order to approach the government activities or to call the attention of government to a particular issue. The table below reveals more.

Table 8: Distribution of Stories according to Opinion/Views

Opinion/Views	The Nigerian Compass	The Hope
Letters-to-the-editors	6 (46.2%)	4 (26.7%)
Opinion/views	7 (53.8%)	11 (73.3%)
Total	13 (100%)	15 (100%)

From the table above, it could be adjusted that The Nigerian Compass had 6 reports representing 46.2% on letters-to-the-editors and 7 stories representing 53.8% on opinion/comments of rural communities within the period of carrying out this research. Also, the Hope had 4 stories representing 26.7% on letter-to-the-editors,

11 stories representing 73.3% were reported on opinion and comments. This analysis also reveals that Nigerian Compass Newspaper permits more opinion/views than the letter-to-the-editors and The Hope Newspaper gives room for publication of opinion/views than letter-to-editors.

Discussion of Findings

The findings revealed that The Hope Newspaper report and publish more stories on the rural communities than the Nigerian Compass within the period under review. It also reveals that news reported about rural development news was mostly in straight news format as the Nigerian Compass published while few reports were published as features, opinion/comment, letter-to-the-editor, photographs and cartoons. There was no report on editorial. This was due to the fact that Nigerian Compass write editorial on national issues and foreign matters as against rural and communities' issues, as observed by the researcher.

The Hope, on its part had published stories on straight news format while the features, editorials, opinion/comment, letters-to-the-editors, photographs and cartoon received little attention. The pages of the newspapers were mostly devoted to government news, advertorials, sports etc.

It also reveals that crime/disaster has highest report in The Nigerian Compass. Other types of news but religion sports and entertainment have no reports. The Hope reports as highest reports on development projects there is no report on health. Agriculture/business news came second in frequency while news on politics came third in the frequency.

As stated earlier in this study, the page position (front page, inside page and back page) devoted to the rural reports were used to discover the prominence attached to the reported stories. It's apparently shown that majority of reports done in Nigerian Compass were published inside page while 5 reports were published on front page.

There was no report on the back page. As observed by the researcher, Nigerian Compass devoted its back page to articles, features and comments, while The Hope reports on the inside page, which is considered as least importance, 18 reports were published on the front page of The Hope. There was no report on the back page of

The Hope. The Hope, as observed by the researcher, devoted particularly its back page to sports and comments.

Furthermore, it reveals that reports were done on columns (1-2, 3-4, 5-6) in Nigerian Compass and The Hope. 85 reports were on 3-4 columns in Nigerian Compass while 53 reports were on 1-2 columns. Columns 5-6 had 37 which are considered as most importance.

In the Hope Newspaper, 74 reports on 1-2 columns, which is regarded as last importance while 64 reports done on 3-4 columns came second and 60 reports were done on 5-6 columns.

It is therefore obvious that Nigerian Compass had reports on its columns in 3-4 while The Hope had highest reports on columns 1-2, meaning that The Hope did not give more position to rural communities' news.

All reports were reported on inches 1-5. In Nigerian Compass reports were published on 5-8 inches. It is obvious from the fact above that The Hope had reports on inches than Nigerian Compass and The Hope had reports on inches than Nigerian Compass.

Furthermore, both Nigerian Compass and The Hope reported rural communities' news on paragraphs. Both Nigerian Compass and the Hope published on paragraph 5-10. Paragraph 1-4 and 11 and above, reporting on Nigerian Compass. From all indications, it can be deduced that the Nigerian Compass and The Hope, within the period of study did not attached much prominence to reports about the rural communities.

Both newspapers, as studied by the researcher, permitted opinions/comments as well as letters-to-the-editors. Nigerian Compass had reports as letters-to-the-editors and stories as opinion/views while The Hope had stories as letters-to-the-editors and stories as opinion/view. It can be however seen that opinion/views and letters-to-the-editors published by the two papers were minimal compared to the space devoted to straight news items in the newspapers.

Summary of Findings

Obviously, the research work of press coverage of rural development news has been able to reveal the followings;

- i. The press does report rural development news but, the space so devoted to such reports are very minimal when compared to the numbers of space devoted to advertorials, foreign news, sports and federal government or city development news.
- ii. Within the study period, Nigerian Compass, and The Hope Newspaper's reports are mostly inform of straight news which are published in columns and paragraphs that are considered least in relevance.
- iii. It could be seen that most of rural development news about rural communities are crime/disaster in Nigerian Compass, which is national newspaper.
- iv. Also, Nigerian Compass and The Hope have not given enough prominence and importance to rural development news most of the reports were found on the inside page of the newspapers, which is considered as least importance while rare reports were found on the front of the both newspaper while there is no report on the back pages of the papers.
- v. The findings also showed that Nigerian Compass and The Hope Newspaper have not done justice in reporting rural development news about the rural communities.
- vi. Moreso, Nigerian Compass and The Hope have not allotted much space (inches) to pictorial news about rural development news. While there were few reports on inches 1-4 of the newspapers, there is no report on inches 5-8 of both newspapers.
- vii. The findings also revealed that paragraphs 1-4 and 5-10 have highest in Nigerian Compass in which paragraphs 11 and is expected to take a leading space.
- viii. Analysis further reveals that the press covers rural development news on issues of political, agriculture/business and education/literacy. But, these issues are some of the most vital ones facing rural communities who are illiterates and mostly farmers by occupation.
- ix. The press, Nigerian Compass and The Hope (though not sufficient enough), devoted space for letters-to-the-editors as well as comments/opinion. There were few letters-to-the-editors and opinion/views in both newspapers. This could be due to the fact that the press has not yet seen itself as a channel to given opinion/communities on rural development issues and as an avenue for concerned individuals to express their views.

Conclusion

This study has so far examined the way and how the Nigerian Compass and The Hope Newspapers reported rural development news in Nigeria. From all findings during the study, one could therefore conclude that, Nigerian Compass, The Hope and Nigerian Media generally are guilty of imbalance, inaccuracy in their coverage about rural development news as fond of under reporting and attaching little preference to the rural communities.

Severin and Tankad (1997) cited in Daramola (2006) said that the Agenda Setting Theory ascribed to the press is not being used in a positive way. She further postulates:

“In a sense, the newspaper is the prime mover in setting the territorial agenda. It has a great part in determining what most people will be talking about, what most people will think the facts are and what people will regard as the way problems are to be dealt with”

It can however be concluded that the most reported types of news on rural development news are crime/disaster while type of reports like entertainment, interview, religion and sports, which are of interest of ruralists were not given much prominence or importance. This, no doubt, discourages the young rural dwellers that make them migrate to urban centers to seek for greener pastures and where their voices could be heard.

More so, it can be concluded that Nigerian Compass, precisely, has not devotes space, its back page and front pages to rural development news stories rather, much spaces are allotted to stories about national events.

Recommendations

The facts, figures, table, results or analysis of the findings of this study revealed that there is urgent need for more effective coverage of rural development news in Nigeria by the mass media due to the fact that it is belied that consistency and frequency in reporting of rural areas will fast track rapid development such as portable water, good road and other developmental infrastructures. This can further be possible through the following recommendations:

- i. First of all, journalists in Newspaper organizations should be sensitized and conscience through training and retraining programs, on the need to practice development journalism. Not only this, journalists, especially the town-based reporters should also be exposed to practical training by assigning them to cover rural development stories from rural communities. This will enable the journalists to know the yearnings and aspirations of the rural population.
- ii. As a matter of fact, press should have a paradigm shift, by doing away with their old way of reporting rural population from negative side to positive reporting that will better the lots of rural communities through positive reporting news, features, editorials, articles, cartoons etc. about the rural communities.
- iii. The press should also produce and publish picture stories that display particular social needs in the rural areas such as bad roads, dysfunctional borehole etc. with the expectation that government would be moved to solve the problems.
- iv. As a way to curb the imbalance of flow of communication between rural communities and urban areas, government, donor agencies and development agencies should, as matter of necessity, decentralize the practice of journalism by establishing rural/community newspapers in the rural communities so that their voices would be heard by the government.
- v. Also, space, columns, paragraphs given to news of rural communities should be improved on so that the ruralists would not remain at the receiving end.
- vi. As another way to stop imbalance in flow of information between the rural and urban societies, people at rural levels should establish self-help projects such as setting up rural/community newspapers.
- vii. Government, in its part should respond stimulatingly to the people's plights by fulfilling its promises made during elections.

References

- Adewale, I. A. (1990). Rural Development in Nigeria: A Review of Selected Issues Involved. *The Nigeria Journal of Local Government Studies*. Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 31-36.
- Anaeto, S. G. (2008). *Rural Community Newspaper-Principles and Practice*. Lagos: Jamiro Press Link.
- Christopher, E. *Participatory Communication and Rural Community Development: A Conceptual Examination*.
- In Soola, E. O. (ed) *Ebenezer Soola Conference on Communication Proceedings*. Ibadan: Kraft Book Ltd.
- Daramola, I. (2003). *Introduction to Mass Communication*, Lagos: Rothan Press Ltd.
- Daramola, I. (2005). *Mass Media and Society*. Lagos: Rothan Press Ltd.
- Duyile, D. (2005). *Writing for the Media: A Manual for African Journalists*. Lagos: Gong Communication Ltd.
- Duyile, D. (2007). *Makers of Nigerian Press*. Lagos: Gang Communication Ltd.
- Folarin B. (1998). *Theories of Mass Communication: An Introductory Text*. Ibadan: Stirling Horden Publication Ltd.
- Kamath, M. V. *The Journalists' Handbook*, New Delhi: Vikes Publishing House Ltd.
- Nwankwo, E. I. Putting the People First: Communication Trends for Rural Development in Nigeria in Soola ed. (2007). *Ebenezer Soola Conference on Communication: Proceedings*. Ibadan: Kraft Book Ltd.
- Nworgu, K. O. (2005). *Mass Communication: A Handbook of Terms and Concepts*. Enugu: New Generation Books.
- Oduko, S. Community Areas as Model for Communication Integration in Nnaemka, T., Uviegnara, E. & Uyo, D. ed (2005). *Philosophy and Dimension of National Communication Policy*. Lagos: Center for Black & Africa Arts and Civilization National Theatre.
- Ofor, O. C. (2005). *Nigeria Press: Review, Trends and Prospects*. Port-Harcourt: Penpower Communication.
- Ogundowole, O., Alabi, F. & Afolayan, S. (2007). *Essential of News Reporting*. Akure: Success Publisher Ltd.
- Opooyin A. (2003). *Specialised Reporting*. Lagos: Batapin Associates.
- Ornewere, J. A. & Akindele, R. A. (2002). *Editing and Producing in Print Journalism*. Ibadan: Adelef Communication.
- Owoeye, D. K. (2011). *A Technical Report on Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES)*. Submitted to the Department of Mass Communication, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State.
- Salami, O. R. & Oginibo, E. O. (2007). *Introduction to Research Methods and Precision Journalism*. Akure: Pamma Press.
- Sambe, J. A. (2004). *Introduction to Mass Communication Practice in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Book Ltd.
- Soola, E. O. (ed) (2002). *Communication for Development Purposes*. Ibadan: Kraft Book Ltd.
- The History of Nigerian Compass Newspaper, retrieved from www.compassnewspapers.com.
- Udoakah, N. (1998). *Development Communication*, Lagos: Stirling Horden Publishers Nig. Ltd.

Article Information:

<i>Received</i>	28-Sept-2025
<i>Revised</i>	30-Nov-2025
<i>Accepted</i>	3-Dec-2025
<i>Published</i>	15-Dec-2025

Declarations:

Author's Contribution:

- **Conceptualization, and intellectual revisions**
- **Data collection, interpretation, and drafting of manuscript**
- The author agrees to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed

• **Conflict of Interest:** NIL

• **Funding Sources:** NIL

Correspondence:

Owoeye David Kolawole

kolawoledavidowoeye@gmail.com
