

Oramedia as a Tool for Women's Mobilization for Community Development in Southeast Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effectiveness of oramedia communication forms in mobilizing women for community development during August Meetings in Southeast Nigeria. Specifically, it sought to determine the dominant oramedia forms used for mobilization, identify those applied in conveying development messages, assess challenges associated with their use, and analyze factors influencing their effectiveness. A mixed-method research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches was adopted. The study involved a sample of 270 women leaders selected from a population of 2,770 using a multistage sampling technique across communities in the Southeast geopolitical zone. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire with key women executives actively involved in the August Meetings. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis. Findings revealed that folk drama and plays were the most commonly utilized oramedia forms for mobilizing women during the August Meetings. These traditional communication channels significantly enhanced women's participation in health campaigns, sanitation exercises, cooperative fundraising, and community infrastructure projects. However, challenges such as low participation among younger women and the declining perception of oramedia as a serious communication tool limited its effectiveness. The study recommends strengthening hybrid communication strategies that integrate traditional and modern media to promote inclusive, women-led community development in Southeast Nigeria.

Keywords- Oramedia; Women mobilization; Community development; August Meetings; Southeast Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Community development is vital to societal growth and transformation. It is a process that entails pooling of resources especially where resources are scarce to execute programmes/projects targeted at addressing the needs of the people felt. In Nigeria, particularly in the South East region, community development is often championed by women during the annual August Meetings. These meetings provide a platform for women to mobilize and participate in community development initiatives. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives depends largely on the communication forms and mobilization strategies deployed. Communication is central to rural and community development and its impact on overall development of all sectors of any nation's economy can never be neglected. It further confirms that effective communication is essential in dissemination of information, raising awareness and mobilizing communities towards collective action, and in addressing pressing socio-economic challenges.

Thus, when women meet as a group to discuss community development, they are said to engage in participatory communication which fosters atmosphere of dialogue, cooperation, mutual respect and sharing of initiatives. This community engagement thrives on development communication which is a process of utilizing communication forms and techniques to facilitate positive social change, community development and improvement in the overall well-being of the people. Adebayo & Balogun, 2019 refers to development communication as a branch of communication studies that emphasizes the strategic use of communication to promote social change and development, particularly at the grassroots level. Therefore, to facilitate understanding and achieving of consensus, the women adopt traditional communication modes (songs, dance,

dramas, storytelling) that promotes collective action on issues that are important to them with the goal to achieve improvement in the overall well-being of the people.

In the context of women's participation in community development, effective communication ensures that women are informed, empowered, and actively involved in decision-making processes. As noted by Okafor and Eze (2020), communication platforms that encourage dialogue and feedback enhance collective action, leading to more inclusive and sustainable development initiatives. Therefore, adoption of culturally embedded communication forms such as oramedia is essential in promoting women's mobilization and participation in community development projects.

Community development relies heavily on participatory communication, where local populations are actively engaged in discussions and decision-making processes. Participatory communication fosters inclusivity, ensuring that community members, especially marginalized groups such as women, contribute meaningfully to development initiatives (Obi & Longe, 2020). According to Oke and Fawole (2019), when communication is culturally relevant and accessible, it enhances community ownership of development projects, leading to their sustainability and success. Traditional forms of communication, including oramedia (oral media), play crucial role in mobilizing communities for development. Oramedia consists of indigenous communication methods such as storytelling, songs, drama, folktales, town criers, and communal meetings, which are deeply rooted in African cultural systems (Nwankwo, 2020). These communication forms are particularly effective in rural settings where literacy levels may be low, allowing for the transmission of messages in a manner that resonates with the local audience (Akpan, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

The August Meeting remains a major platform for women's mobilization for community development in Southeast Nigeria, with oramedia traditionally serving as a key medium for communication and collective action. However, there is limited empirical evidence on how effectively oramedia is currently used during these meetings to convey development messages and mobilize women. It is also unclear whether oramedia remains influential in the face of growing reliance on modern and digital communication channels.

In addition, little is known about the specific challenges and enabling factors affecting the effectiveness of oramedia, including generational differences, cultural relevance, and resource availability. This gap makes it difficult for policymakers and development practitioners to design communication strategies that are culturally grounded and effective. This study addresses this gap by examining the role, effectiveness, and limitations of oramedia in women's mobilization during August Meetings in Southeast Nigeria.

Objective of Study

Generally, the study was designed to investigate the effectiveness of oramedia communication forms in mobilizing women for community development during August meeting in Southeast, Nigeria. Specifically, the following goals were set to be achieved in this study:

1. To determine the oramedia communication forms used during August meetings to mobilize women for community development in Southeast Nigeria.
2. To find out the oramedia communication forms mostly used in conveying community development messages during August meetings.
3. To ascertain the challenges in the use of oramedia communication forms in fostering collective action among women during the August meeting in Southeast Nigeria.
4. To find out the approaches to community development that suit oramedia forms during August meeting in South East Nigeria.
5. To identify factors that limit the effectiveness of oramedia communication forms in mobilizing women for community development during August meetings

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relevance of Oramedia in Modern Communication

Despite advancements in digital communication, oramedia remains a significant tool in rural areas where access to modern technologies is limited. For instance, in Nigeria, oramedia has been effectively used to communicate climate change adaptation strategies, helping to enhance public awareness and participation in sustainable development initiatives (Nwafor & Aghaebe, 2025). Additionally, contemporary media platforms such as radio and television have integrated oramedia elements to make their messages more culturally relatable and effective (Wilson, 2023).

Oramedia is a crucial component of traditional communication that continues to influence contemporary media practices. It serves as a means of preserving cultural heritage, mobilizing communities, and educating individuals. Even with the rise of modern communication

technologies, oramedia remains a relevant and powerful tool for grassroots engagement and community development

Understanding August Meetings as a Platform for Mobilization

The August Meeting is an annual congress held by Igbo women in Nigeria every August. This event serves as a significant homecoming, bringing together Igbo women from both urban areas and the diaspora to their matrimonial villages. The primary objectives of these gatherings include community development, conflict management, human development, and other socio-economic and cultural initiatives (Ugwubude 2019)

The "August Meeting" is a significant annual gathering among Igbo women in southeastern Nigeria, serving as a platform for community development, conflict resolution, and socio-economic initiatives. This tradition underscores the pivotal role women play in fostering communal growth and cohesion within Igbo society. The August Meeting is a product of the Catholic Women Organisation (CWO) formed by Mrs Okoye of Onitsha Province, before the Nigerian Civil War. It is an annual event among the Igbo tribe in the Eastern part of Nigeria, intended to foster empowerment, reorientation and mobilisation of women for community building and political participation. (Victor Ejike, 2023).

The evolution of the August Meeting can be traced back to the colonial era, marked by mass urbanisation and social upheaval. As Igbo women migrated to urban centres, they sought to maintain connections with their rural roots. This gave birth to the "Home and Abroad" meetings, providing a platform for discussing development issues and preserving the link between urban and rural communities. As part of the event, Igbo women in Nigeria and the diaspora wear clothing of certain colours and styles throughout August and the first week of September.

Central to the August Meeting tradition is the concept of inclusivity and unity. All married women in the community are expected to participate, with attendance considered compulsory. Not attending is strongly discouraged, with permission for non-attendance granted only on grounds of ill-health, childbirth, or bereavement.

Today, the August Meeting stands as a beacon of cultural pride and empowerment within Igbo society. Beyond its role in preserving tradition and fostering community cohesion, it serves as a catalyst for social change and progress. Discussions at the meeting encompass women's rights, gender equality, education, entrepreneurship, and language preservation. In essence, the August Meeting transcends a mere gathering; it symbolises strength, unity, and resilience, embodying the collective spirit of the Igbo people and their commitment to shaping a future rooted in tradition and progress.

Development communication Conceptualized

Bourn (2015) posits that Development communication refers to the use of communication to facilitate social

development, adding that Development communication engages stakeholders and policy makers, establishes conducive environments, assesses risks and opportunities and promotes information exchange to create positive social change through sustainable development. Nora and Quebral (2020) expanded the definition, calling it "the art and science of human communication applied to the speedy transformation of a country and the mass of its people from poverty to a dynamic state of economic growth that makes possible greater social equality and the larger fulfillment of the human potential" Jamias (2018) articulated the philosophy of development communication, informing that it is anchored on three main ideas: purposive, value- laden, and pragmatic.

Owuamalam (2022) asserts that poverty in communication format selection for development can stunt advancement and improvements within communities and nation-states. He therefore advocates the use of appropriate development communication strategy as tonic that can stimulate active audience participation in community development projects. How effective is oramedia as a strategy of development communication to women who assemble in their respective communities for their August meetings in Southeast Nigeria becomes an issue to be investigated in the current study. According to Melcote (1991) in Waisbord (2021), the ultimate goal of development communication is to raise the quality of life of the people, including; to increase income and wellbeing, eradicate social injustice, promote land reforms and freedom of speech. Development communication techniques include information dissemination and education, behavior change, social marketing, social mobilization, media advocacy, communication for social change, and community participation.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Participatory Communication Theory and supported by Development Communication Theory to explain the role of oramedia in mobilizing women for community development during August Meetings in Southeast Nigeria.

Participatory Communication Theory emphasizes dialogue, community involvement, and shared ownership of the communication process. Rather than viewing people as passive receivers, the theory sees development as a process driven by local participation and cultural relevance. This framework is particularly suitable for this study because oramedia operates through interaction, performance, storytelling, and collective discussion, which are central to August Meetings. The findings showing that songs, drama, and performances are the most effective mobilization tools reflect the participatory nature of oramedia, while the reduced engagement of younger women highlights a weakening of participatory structures due to modern media influence.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative survey research design to examine the role of oramedia in mobilizing women for community development during August Meetings in Southeast Nigeria. The design enabled the systematic collection of numerical data to measure patterns, relationships, and predictive effects among the study variables.

Area and Population

The study was conducted in Southeast Nigeria, covering Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, and Enugu States. The population consisted of 2,770 women leaders who coordinate August Meeting activities across communities in the region.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 350 respondents was determined using Yamane's formula. Questionnaires were proportionally distributed across the four selected states, and 270 valid responses were retrieved and analyzed. A multistage sampling procedure was applied involving purposeful selection of states, stratification by senatorial districts, proportional allocation, and systematic random selection of respondents within communities.

Instrument and Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising demographic and analytical sections. Items were measured on a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree) to capture respondents’ perceptions of oramedia effectiveness, utilization patterns, and influencing factors.

Validity and Reliability

Instrument validity was ensured through expert review and pilot testing. Reliability was established using Cronbach’s Alpha ($\alpha = 0.82$), confirming internal consistency.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 20). Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) addressed the research questions, while Pearson correlation and simple regression were used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Oramedia Forms Used for Mobilization

Table 1: Oramedia Forms Used for Mobilization During August Meetings

Item	Mean	SD	Decision
Folk songs are often used to sensitize women for August Meetings	3.04	.751	Accepted
Proverbs and idioms are widely applied to encourage women’s participation	2.06	1.156	Rejected
Storytelling is commonly used during discussions to buttress critical issues	2.71	.750	Accepted
Traditional dances and performances are effective tools for mobilization	3.14	1.086	Accepted
Folk drama and plays are frequently used to enhance community development	2.93	1.237	Accepted
Grand Mean	2.77	.416	Accepted

Interpretation:

Performance-based oramedia forms—particularly traditional dances, folk songs, drama, and storytelling—are commonly used to mobilize women during August Meetings, while proverbs and idioms are less frequently applied.

Oramedia Forms Used for Conveying Development Messages

Table 2: Oramedia Forms Used to Convey Development Messages

Item	Mean	SD	Decision
Folk songs are effective for passing health and sanitation messages	3.21	.664	Accepted
Proverbs are used to communicate moral and ethical lessons	2.17	1.220	Rejected
Storytelling helps explain community development needs	3.00	.813	Accepted
Folk plays highlight economic empowerment messages	3.11	.905	Accepted

Traditional performances convey unity and cooperation	3.15	.997	Accepted
Grand Mean	2.93	.503	Accepted

Interpretation:

Respondents agree that oramedia is effective in communicating development messages, especially through songs, drama, and performances, while proverbs play a limited role.

Challenges Associated with Oramedia Usage

Table 3: Challenges Associated with Oramedia

Item	Mean	SD	Decision
Some women do not take oramedia seriously	2.78	0.95	Accepted
Lack of trained performers limits effectiveness	2.42	1.07	Rejected
Dialect/language differences hinder understanding	2.31	0.96	Rejected
Younger women prefer modern communication platforms	3.12	1.01	Accepted
Oramedia oversimplifies development issues	2.18	0.91	Rejected
Grand Mean	2.56	.98	Accepted

Interpretation:

The major challenge identified is declining participation among younger women, while language barriers, performer competence, and message simplicity are not perceived as significant constraints.

Compatibility of Oramedia with Development Approaches

Table 4: Compatibility of Oramedia with Development Approaches

Item	Mean	SD	Decision
Suitable for self-help projects	3.27	.890	Accepted
Promotes health campaigns	3.30	.748	Accepted
Fundraising and cooperatives supported by songs and drama	3.33	.835	Accepted
Useful for peacebuilding	3.08	.878	Accepted
Proverbs and storytelling teach accountability	2.09	1.178	Rejected
Grand Mean	3.01	.45	Accepted

Interpretation

Oramedia aligns strongly with participatory development approaches such as fundraising, health campaigns, self-help projects, and peacebuilding.

Factors Limiting Oramedia Effectiveness

Table 5: Limiting Factors Affecting Oramedia

Item	Mean	SD	Decision
Cultural relevance	3.17	.907	Accepted
Credibility of performers	2.54	.975	Accepted
Availability of costumes & instruments	3.35	.807	Accepted
Education level	2.45	1.071	Rejected
Support from community leaders	3.15	1.158	Accepted
Grand Mean	2.93	.50	Accepted

Interpretation:

Structural and cultural factors—rather than education level—significantly shape the effectiveness of oramedia in women’s mobilization.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One (H₀₁):

There is no significant relationship between oramedia use and effective women’s mobilization.

- $r = .218, p < .001$
- $R^2 = .047; F(1,263) = 13.09; \beta = .282$

Interpretation:

Oramedia use significantly predicts women’s mobilization, though with modest explanatory power. The null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis Two (H₀₂):

Compatible development approaches do not significantly predict women’s mobilization.

- $r = .425, p < .001$
- $R^2 = .180; F = 58.133; \beta = .506$

Interpretation:

Development approaches compatible with oramedia are stronger predictors of women’s mobilization than oramedia use alone. The null hypothesis is rejected.

DISCUSSION

Performance-Based Oramedia and Women’s Mobilization

The findings from table 1 demonstrate that women’s mobilization during August Meetings is largely performance-driven. Folk songs, drama, and traditional dances dominate mobilization efforts, underscoring the

participatory and expressive nature of oramedia. This supports earlier scholarship that describes oramedia as “people’s media,” rooted in communal ownership, dialogue, and shared cultural experience (Ugbajah, 1985; Wilson, 2008). Performance-based communication enhances attention, emotional engagement, and collective identity, making it particularly effective for mobilization.

Oramedia as a Development Communication Strategy

Table 2 shows that Oramedia proved effective in communicating health, sanitation, unity, and economic empowerment messages. These findings align with Entertainment-Education and Theatre for Development perspectives, which argue that culturally grounded performances bridge the gap between information dissemination and behavioural response (Singhal & Rogers, 1999; Manyozo, 2012). The limited role of proverbs suggests a shift away from abstract symbolism toward more demonstrative and experiential communication forms.

Generational Shifts and Emerging Communication Tensions

A major challenge according to table 3 is the declining engagement of younger women, driven by their preference for modern and digital communication platforms. This reflects broader transformations in media consumption and supports arguments by Servaes (2008) and Waisbord (2014) that participatory communication systems must continually adapt to remain legitimate and credible within changing social contexts.

Compatibility of Oramedia with Development Approaches

The findings in table 4 indicate that oramedia is highly compatible with participatory development approaches within the context of August Meetings in Southeast Nigeria. The high mean scores recorded for self-help projects, health campaigns, fundraising, cooperative activities, and peacebuilding suggest that oramedia functions effectively in collective, action-oriented development settings. These approaches typically require shared understanding, emotional engagement, and community ownership—elements that are naturally embedded in oramedia forms such as songs, drama, and performances.

The strong acceptance of fundraising and cooperative activities supported through songs and drama underscores the mobilizing power of performance-based communication, which encourages participation and reinforces communal responsibility. Similarly, the suitability of oramedia for health campaigns and peacebuilding reflects its ability to simplify complex issues, foster dialogue, and promote consensus in culturally meaningful ways.

Structural and Cultural Conditions for Effectiveness

From table 5, the findings show that the effectiveness of oramedia is strongly influenced by resource availability, cultural relevance, and leadership support. These findings reinforce participatory communication theory, which emphasizes enabling environments and institutional backing as prerequisites for sustained community engagement. The rejection of education level as a limiting factor confirms the inclusive nature of oramedia, supporting Ugbajah’s (1985) position that its strength lies in its accessibility across literacy levels.

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