

Audience Call-In Programmes and Rural Community Development: A Study of Select Communities in Abak Local Government Area

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Abstract

This study examined the role of audience call-in programmes in promoting rural community development in select communities in Abak Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. The study sought to determine residents level of participation, the contribution of call-in programmes to development of Abak communities and the areas of development influenced by these programmes. The study was anchored on Development Media Theory and Democratic Participant Media Theory. The survey research design was adopted for the study. A sample size of 400 respondents selected from Otoro, Afaha-Obong, and Abak Urban communities were sampled using the purposive and accidental non-probability sampling techniques while 390 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved and data presented in tables and analyzed using frequency. The findings revealed that residents of the selected communities are exposed to audience call-in programmes on radio and that participation in such programmes exists though it varies among individuals. The study also found that audience call-in programmes contribute to rural community development to a considerable extent. Specifically, the programmes were perceived to influence development in areas such as education, healthcare, community mobilization, and road/drainage construction, with education recording the highest response. The study concludes that audience call-in programmes serve as important platforms for community participation and discussion of development issues in rural areas. It was recommended that radio stations should strengthen audience call-in programmes and devote more attention to rural development issues, while community members should be encouraged to participate more actively in such programmes.

Keywords: Audience, Communication, Programmes, Rural, Development,

Introduction

One format of radio programming that has significantly enhanced audience participation in broadcasting is the audience call-in programme. Call-in programmes allow listeners to participate directly in discussions by phoning into the studio to express opinions, ask questions, or contribute ideas on issues being discussed. This format transforms communication from a one-way flow of information into a more interactive and participatory process. Through this interaction, presenters gain immediate feedback from their audience while listeners feel more involved in the communication process. Scholars have noted that call-in programmes strengthen democratic communication by giving ordinary citizens a platform to voice their concerns on social, political, and developmental issues (Asemah, Nwammua & Nkwam-oma, 2017; Oso, 2018.)

In recent years, audience call-in programmes have become an important tool for development communication, especially in rural areas. These programmes provide opportunities for discussing local challenges such as agriculture, healthcare, education, infrastructure, and governance. By allowing rural dwellers to share their experiences and concerns, call-in programmes help to highlight community problems that may otherwise remain

unnoticed by policymakers and development agencies. Furthermore, they promote awareness, encourage dialogue, and sometimes stimulate collective action within communities (Manyozo, 2018).

Rural community development involves the process of improving the economic, social, and infrastructural conditions of rural areas in order to enhance the quality of life of residents. It includes efforts aimed at improving access to basic services such as healthcare, education, agriculture, transportation, and communication. Communication plays a vital role in this process because development initiatives require the active participation and awareness of community members. Media platforms, particularly radio, serve as important channels for mobilizing rural populations, sharing information about development programmes, and encouraging public participation in community affairs (Servaes, 2020).

In Nigeria, many radio stations broadcast audience call-in programmes that address issues affecting local communities. These programmes often provide platforms for discussing governance, social welfare, and community development. In Abak Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, residents rely heavily on radio for information and civic engagement due to its wide coverage and accessibility. However, despite the popularity of call-in programmes, questions remain about the extent to which these programmes actually contribute to rural community development. It is therefore necessary to examine how audience call-in programmes influence awareness, participation, and development in rural communities. This study therefore investigates audience call-in programmes and rural community development with particular focus on selected communities in Abak Local Government Area.

Statement of the Problem

Audience call-in programmes on radio stations in Akwa Ibom State, such as Radio Nigeria Atlantic 104.5 FM, Akwa Ibom Broadcasting Corporation (AKBC) 90.5FM, Redemption 101.5 FM, Premium 89.9 FM, Comfort FM, Passion 94.5FM, among others, play a significant role in promoting rural community development in Akwa Ibom State by enhancing information dissemination, enabling participatory governance, and fostering socio-cultural understanding. Research indicates that these interactive, often vernacular-based programmes act as vital tools for educating rural dwellers on health, agriculture, and government policies.

Most of these programme are aimed at fostering rural development of the stations host communities and other environments. Some of these call-in programmes on radio stations in Akwa Ibom State are; The Mandate and Nsong Idem on Atlantic 104.5 FM, Sibaba Sibaba and NtiaNtia Asaka on AKBC 90.5 FM, Community Voices on Redemption 101.5 FM, Society Watch on Premium 89.9FM, Community Focus on Passion 94.5 FM,

But the problem is, do these programmes achieve these objectives? Do coverage of these issues reach responsible agencies and make them act? Have developmental goals been reached and achieved in Afaha Obong, Abak Urban and Otoro communities in Abak Local Government Area? Are these call-in programmes effectively contributing to rural community development or merely serving as platforms for discussion without producing meaningful developmental impact?. It is against this backdrop and to provide answers to these uncertainties that this study therefore seeks to examine the role of audience call-in programmes in promoting rural community development in Abak Urban, Otoro and Afaha-obong communities in Abak Local Government Area.

Objectives of the Study

This study set to achieve the following objectives:

- i. find out Abak residents level of exposure and participation in call-in programmes on radio;
- ii. ascertain if rural developmental issues are covered during call-in programmes on radio;
- iii. evaluate the extent to which audience call-in programmes contribute to rural community development in Abak Local Government Area;
- iv. identify the kind of rural development that has been influenced in Abak communities by audience call-in programmes on radio.

Literature Review

Concept of Audience Participation

Before the sophistication of technology, communication was largely one-way, flowing only from the media to the audience, who were previously regarded as passive receivers of information. However, the continuous advancement of technology, which has significantly altered and transformed the media landscape, led to the inclusion of the audience in the communication process, thereby enabling participatory communication between

the media and the audience. Audience participation therefore refers to the involvement of media audiences in the communication process through feedback, interaction, contribution of ideas, and engagement in media discussions. Traditionally, audiences were viewed as passive receivers of media messages. However, modern broadcasting has shifted toward participatory communication where audiences actively contribute to programme contents and public discourse. In broadcasting, audience participation allows listeners and viewers to express opinions, ask questions, react to issues, and contribute to discussions through different channels such as phone calls, text messages, and social media platforms. This participatory approach strengthens the relationship between media organizations and their audiences while also promoting democratic communication.

According to Napoli (2019), audience participation transforms communication from a one-way process into a two-way interactive process that encourages public engagement and inclusiveness. Similarly, Hendy (2020) observes that audience participation has become an essential feature of contemporary broadcasting because it gives ordinary citizens opportunities to contribute to discussions on social and developmental issues. Furthermore, audience participation is highly important in development communication because it encourages people to become actively involved in issues affecting their communities. Participatory communication ensures that development messages are not imposed on the people but discussed with them. In support of this view, Ojebode (2018) argues that development-oriented programmes become more effective when audiences are involved in programme discussions and production processes.

In rural communities, audience participation enables community members to voice their concerns on matters such as poor roads, inadequate healthcare, insecurity, education, and agriculture. Through participation, rural dwellers contribute local knowledge and experiences that may assist policymakers and development agencies in addressing community challenges. Additionally, Kente and Lucas (2023) found that audience involvement in broadcast programmes improved public interest and strengthened programme effectiveness among residents in Jos. The study emphasized that participatory media formats encourage audience attention, interaction, and engagement with societal issues. Therefore, audience participation is an important aspect of modern broadcasting because it promotes interaction, inclusiveness, feedback, and public engagement in development discussions.

Call-in Programmes in Broadcasting

Call-in programmes are interactive broadcast programmes that allow audiences to participate in discussions through telephone calls during programme presentation. These programmes have become popular in both radio and television broadcasting because they encourage direct interaction between broadcasters and audiences. Call-in programmes usually focus on public affairs, politics, health, education, governance, agriculture, entertainment, and community issues. During such programmes, listeners are given opportunities to express opinions, ask questions, make complaints, or contribute suggestions concerning issues under discussion. The emergence of call-in broadcasting has significantly changed the nature of communication in the media industry. Instead of audiences remaining passive listeners, they now actively participate in programme discussions. Hendy (2020) notes that interactive broadcasting formats have expanded democratic communication by allowing citizens to contribute directly to media conversations.

Similarly, public affairs broadcasting encourages freedom of expression and public engagement. Nwambam, Olalekan, Nze and Udochukwu (2025) explain that public affairs broadcasting promotes citizens' rights to information dissemination, public discussion, and participation in societal issues.

Moreover, call-in programmes are particularly useful in rural areas because they provide platforms through which rural residents can discuss community challenges and draw attention to developmental problems affecting their communities. Through these programmes, issues relating to healthcare, infrastructure, electricity, insecurity, agriculture, and governance are often brought to public attention.

Udoudom, Pam and Aondowase (2023), in their study on "Eki Idediongo" radio programme on Heritage FM, discovered that interactive radio programmes contributed significantly to rural development by promoting community engagement, cultural preservation, and dissemination of useful information among rural audiences in Eket. The study further revealed that audience participation enhanced listeners' interest and involvement in community issues.

In another study, Opara (2025) found that radio programmes focusing on rural environmental issues helped in sensitising rural residents and mobilizing public participation toward environmental awareness in Eleme and Ogoni communities. The study recommended increased audience participation to improve programme effectiveness for rural development. Therefore, call-in programmes have become important tools for public

engagement, democratic communication, and rural development because they provide audiences with opportunities to contribute to discussions affecting their communities.

Rural Community Development

The process of improving the economic, social, political, and infrastructural conditions of rural communities in order to enhance the standard of living of rural residents is regarded as development. Rural development usually focuses on areas such as agriculture, healthcare, education, transportation, electricity, water supply, and employment opportunities. Development scholars believe that meaningful rural development cannot be achieved without adequate communication and active participation of community members. Rural people must be informed, mobilized, and involved in development processes affecting their communities.

Servaes (2020) explains that participatory communication is central to sustainable development because it allows people to identify their problems, discuss possible solutions, and contribute to decision-making processes. In the same vein, Melkote and Steeves (2021) argue that development communication promotes empowerment by encouraging citizens to participate actively in development activities within their communities. Furthermore, radio broadcasting has continued to play important roles in rural development because of its accessibility and wide reach among rural populations. Community radio and development-oriented programmes provide information relating to health, agriculture, governance, education, and community welfare.

Uche, Darlington, Ubani, Ojigwo and Nwakanma (2022), maintain that community broadcasting is highly effective in promoting rural development because it creates opportunities for programme participation, agricultural transformation, good governance, and empowerment of marginalized rural populations. Similarly, Ekwok (2018) observes that development-oriented radio programmes contribute to awareness creation and mobilization of rural communities toward collective development efforts. The study found that public service broadcasting assists rural communities by disseminating information relating to health, agriculture, education, and social responsibilities.

In Nigeria, many rural communities depend heavily on radio for information because of limited access to other forms of media. Consequently, radio programmes that encourage public participation can contribute significantly to rural mobilization and community development.

Review of Empirical Studies

Several empirical studies have examined the relationship between radio programmes and rural development. Kierian, Okpongpong and Udonquak in their 2020 study examined the effects of “Sibaba Sibaba” radio programme on Akwa Ibom State Broadcasting Corporation (AKBC) and moral enlightenment among Otoro Clan, Abak L.G.A. In their findings, it was revealed that indigenous programmes like sibaba sibaba has a positive influence on the youth and radio is a more effective tool in rural development. The study therefore recommended that more programmes should be produced using the local dialect to aid participation and community engagement.

Also, a study by Sunday and Irele (2024), investigated the influence of "Oyin Ado" indigenous phone-in radio programme on road development in Ibadan hinterland. Using a survey method, the researchers found that the programme helped rural residents communicate infrastructural challenges to government authorities and contributed to increased attention toward road development. However, the majority 74.7 % indicated that government response to public requests regarding road development is not prompt. In light of these findings, the study recommended continuous use of the medium to draw the government's attention to their requests, especially concerning community and infrastructural development.

Similarly, Anyadike, Olemadi and Odoemelum (2015) studied local dialect radio programmes and rural development among the Nsukka people of Enugu State. The findings showed that participatory radio programmes improved awareness of development issues and encouraged social integration within rural communities. Adams (2024) also examined the role of community radio stations in rural development in Nigeria and concluded that radio contributes significantly to participatory democracy, agricultural transformation, public enlightenment, and empowerment of rural populations. Despite the numerous studies on radio broadcasting and rural development, few studies have specifically focused on audience call-in programmes and their influence on rural community development in Abak Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. This gap formed the basis for the present study.

Theoretical Framework

Development Media Theory

Development Media Theory is one of the normative theories of the press proposed by Dennis McQuail. The theory emphasises the role of the mass media in supporting national development, particularly in developing societies where communication is considered a key instrument for social and economic transformation. According to the theory, the media are expected to actively contribute to development by disseminating information that promotes education, modernization and social change (McQuail, 2019).

Development Media Theory further stresses that media institutions have a social responsibility to support policies and programmes that promote national development. In this regard, the media should not merely entertain audiences but should also educate and mobilize citizens toward activities that improve their living conditions. Through development-oriented programmes, the media can raise awareness about societal challenges and encourage collective action toward solving them.

This theory is relevant to the present study because audience call-in programmes provide a platform for discussing development issues affecting rural communities. By allowing listeners to participate in conversations about challenges such as poor infrastructure, healthcare, agriculture, and governance, these programmes can draw attention to community needs and stimulate discussions that may influence development efforts. Thus, Development Media Theory helps explain how radio call-in programmes can serve as communication tools for promoting rural community development in Abak Local Government Area.

Democratic Participant Media Theory

Democratic Participant Media Theory emerged as a response to concerns about the concentration of media ownership and the limited opportunities for ordinary citizens to participate in the communication process. The theory advocates for greater access to the media and emphasizes the importance of audience participation in media activities. It argues that communication should be decentralized and that individuals and communities should have the opportunity to express their views through the media (McQuail, 2019).

According to the theory, the media should serve the interests of the public by providing platforms for community expression and grassroots participation. Rather than being dominated by large institutions or political elites, the media should encourage diverse voices and perspectives, especially from marginalized groups and local communities. This participatory approach to communication helps promote democratic values, social inclusion, and community empowerment (Baran & Davis, 2020).

This theory is particularly relevant to this study because audience call-in programmes represent a participatory form of communication in which listeners actively contribute to discussions through telephone calls. Through this interaction, rural residents can express their opinions, raise concerns about developmental issues, and share experiences relating to their communities. Such participation can promote community engagement and encourage dialogue that may contribute to addressing rural development challenges in Abak Local Government Area.

Research Methodology

This study adopted the survey research design and used structured questionnaire as instrument for data collection. The choice of this research design is justified by Ogbuoshi (2021), who posits that a researcher studying people's perceptions, opinions, beliefs, views on a particular subject matter should use the survey method. The survey method is appropriate because it allows the researcher to collect data from respondents in order to examine their exposure to audience call-in programmes and their perception of its contribution to development in their communities in Abak Local Government Area.

The population of the study comprised residents of Abak Local Government Area which according to City Population in 2022 is 177,500. However, for the purpose of this study, three clans were selected: Otoro Clan, Abak Urban Clan, and Afaha-Obong Clan. These clans were chosen to represent communities within the local government area. A sample size of 400 was scientifically determined using the Yards formula developed by Taro Yamene's where $n = N / 1 + N(e)^2$.

The 400 respondents were chosen across the three selected clans: Otoro Clan, Abak Urban Clan, and Afaha-Obong Clan. Due to the absence of reliable population statistics for each clan, the sample was distributed equally among the three clans to ensure balanced representation in the study. Consequently, Otoro Clan and Abak Urban

Clan were allocated 133 respondents each, while Afaha-Obong Clan was allocated 134 respondents, making a total of 400 respondents.

The research adopted the purposive/judgemental and convenient/accidental non-probability sampling techniques. Going by this, the researcher distributed copies of questionnaire in these selected communities to respondents the researcher met by accident and who according to the researcher's judgement, were knowledgeable and will provide accurate responses to the questions in the questionnaire. The researcher continued this method until the copies of questionnaires were exhausted. The data collected from the field were presented in tables and analyzed using frequency counts and simple percentages.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data collected were analysed below in tables using percentages and frequency counts below.

Table 1: Respondents' Exposure to Call-In Programmes

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Highly Exposed	160	41%
Moderately Exposed	150	38%
Low Exposure	80	21%
Total	390	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The table shows that 160 respondents (41%) are highly exposed to audience call-in programmes, while 150 respondents (38%) are moderately exposed. Only 80 respondents (21%) indicated low exposure. This means that 79% (41% + 38%) of the respondents have a reasonable level of exposure to call-in programmes in the study area. This suggests that radio call-in programmes are widely accessed among residents of Abak Local Government Area.

Table 2: Respondents' Frequency of Participation in Call-In Programmes

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Frequently	98	25.1%
Occasionally	184	47.2%
Never	108	27.7%
Total	390	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The table shows that 184 respondents (47.2%) participate occasionally in audience call-in programmes, 98 respondents (25.1%) participate frequently, while 108 respondents (27.7%) have never participated. This indicates that although many residents listen to call-in programmes, participation levels vary among rural dwellers in the study area.

Table 3: Coverage of Rural Development Issues

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	260	67%
Not Sure	40	10%
No	90	23%
Total	390	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

From the table, 260 respondents (67%) agreed that rural development issues are covered during call-in programmes. Meanwhile, 90 respondents (23%) disagreed, and 40 respondents (10%) were not sure. The findings indicate that a significant majority (67%) believe that call-in programmes address rural developmental issues.

Table 4: Contribution of Call-In Programmes to Rural Development in Abak Communities.

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Great Extent	170	44%
Moderate Extent	150	38%
Low Extent	70	18%
Total	390	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The result reveals that 170 respondents (44%) believe that audience call-in programmes contribute to rural development to a great extent, while 150 respondents (38%) believe the contribution is moderate. Only 70 respondents (18%) feel the contribution is low. This implies that 82% (44% + 38%) of respondents perceive call-in programmes as contributing positively to rural development in Otoro, Afaha-obong and Abak Urban communities in Abak.

Table 5: Areas of Rural Development Influenced

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Road/drainage construction	70	18%
Healthcare	100	28%
Education	120	23%
Community Mobilization	100	18%
Total	390	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

From the data presented in the table above, 120 respondents (30.8%) indicated that audience call-in programmes have influenced development in the area of education, 100 respondents (25.6%) each identified healthcare and community mobilization as areas where call-in programmes have contributed to development in the communities, while 70 respondents (17.9%) indicated that call-in programmes have influenced road and drainage construction. This suggests that audience call-in programmes have contributed to rural development in several ways, particularly in promoting education, healthcare awareness, and community mobilization in different development projects in their communities.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: What is the Level of Abak Residents Exposure to and Participation in Audience Call-in Programmes on Radio?

Tables 1 and 2 provided answer to this research question. From the tables, although residents of these communities showed high levels of exposure to audience call-in programmes on radio, their level of participation in these programmes varies. While some respondents indicated that they frequently participate in such programmes, others reported occasionally or no participation. This suggests that although listeners are aware of call-in programmes, factors such as access to telecommunication facilities, confidence, or programme structure may influence the level of participation. This finding aligns with the position of Oso (2018), who noted that audience participation programmes provide opportunities for citizens to express their views and contribute to discussions on issues affecting their communities; as well as conforms to the tenets of the Democratic participant media theory of McQuail.

Research Question 2: Do Call-in Programmes on Radio Stations in Akwa Ibom State Cover Rural Development Issues in Abak Communities?

Findings in table 3 showed that audience call-in programmes play a significant role in creating awareness of rural development issues. A large proportion of respondents agreed that such programmes help to highlight community problems and inform residents about issues affecting their communities. This finding lends credence to Kierien, Okpongkpong & Udonquak (2020), who said that the media as agent of change focuses on the events,

people, issues, trends, etc. affecting the community to promote development at all levels. One of such media they mentioned to be the Akwa Ibom State Broadcasting Station. This station which is government owned has created a programme that propels rural development and moral enlightenment within the state.

Research Question 3: To What Extent Do Call-in Programmes on Radio Stations in Akwa Ibom State Contribute to Development of Rural Communities in Abak?

In answering this question, respondents did not only acknowledge that audience call-in programmes contribute to development in their communities, a significant proportion of respondents, 170 (44%), believe that call-in programmes contribute to development of their communities to a great extent. This finding suggests that discussion of these issues on radio often creates awareness among community members and may attract the attention of relevant authorities or stakeholders who are capable of addressing such problems. Meanwhile, this result aligns with the principles of Development Media Theory, which emphasizes that the media should actively support development by disseminating information and mobilizing citizens toward activities that improve their living conditions.

Research Question 4: What Area of Rural Development have been Influenced by Issues Discussed in Audience Call-in Programmes?

Analysis revealed that issues discussed during call-in programmes help promote awareness and support for educational development within the communities. This was evident in the preponderant responses of 120 (30.8%) respondents who indicated education from the options given. This suggests that discussions on radio call-in programmes have helped to promote awareness about the importance of education, educational opportunities, and community involvement in supporting schools and learning activities.

This finding supports the position of Manyozo (2018) who noted that participatory communication platforms such as radio programmes enable community members to discuss development challenges and stimulate actions that can improve their social and economic conditions. The result also aligns with the assumptions of Agenda-Setting Theory, which explains that the media influence the issues people consider important by giving them prominence.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of audience call-in programmes in promoting rural community development in Otoro, Afaha-Obong, and Abak Urban in Abak Local Government Area. The findings of the study revealed that residents of these communities are exposed to audience call-in programmes on radio and that some members of the communities participate in such programmes, although participation levels vary among individuals. The findings also showed that call-in programmes have contributed to rural development in several areas, particularly in education, healthcare, and community mobilisation. By drawing attention to community needs and encouraging public dialogue, audience call-in programmes serve as important platforms for promoting development-oriented discussions and community engagement in Abak Local Government Area.

From the findings of this study therefore, it is safe to conclude that audience call in programmes on radio stations in Akwa Ibom State have contributed significantly to the development of communities in Abak Local Government Area.

Recommendations

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

- i. Community members should participate more actively in call-in programmes as it serve as one major platforms to express their concerns and contribute ideas that can help address development challenges in their communities.
- ii. Radio stations should continue to strengthen audience call-in programmes by dedicating more airtime to issues relating to rural development so that community problems can receive wider attention.
- iii. Government authorities and relevant stakeholders should pay close attention to issues raised during call-in programmes and take practical steps to address them, thereby enhancing the impact of these programmes on rural community development.
- iv. Programme producers should design specialized call-in segments that focus on key areas of rural development (e.g., health, education, agriculture and infrastructure) to ensure balanced and comprehensive development coverage.

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