

PRESS COVERAGE OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT NEWS: A STUDY OF NIGERIAN COMPASS AND THE HOPE NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the extent and nature of press coverage of rural development news in Nigeria, using *Nigerian Compass* and *The Hope* newspapers as case studies. It was anchored on the Development Media Theory, Social Responsibility Theory and the framework of Development Journalism. A total of 48 editions—24 from each newspaper—were sampled using a simple random sampling technique. Two editions per month over a one-year period from May 2011 to April 2012 were selected. 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 provided insight into the consistency, prominence, and thematic focus of rural development news. Findings indicated that the two selected newspapers did not give much prominence to the coverage of rural development news; rather, they preferred world and city news. Again, *The Hope* newspaper reported and published more stories on rural communities than the *Nigerian Compass* during the period under review. It was also revealed that news on rural development was mostly reported in straight news format, as commonly practiced by the *Nigerian Compass*, while fewer reports were published as features, opinion/comment, letters-to-the-editor, photographs, and cartoons. There was no report in the editorial format. This was due to the fact that the *Nigerian Compass* wrote editorials on national issues and foreign matters, rather than on rural and community issues. It was recommended that the imbalance in the flow of communication between rural communities and urban areas could be bridged if the government, donor agencies, and development organizations decentralized the practice of journalism by establishing rural/community newspapers.

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

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 Ogundowole et al., (2007) (), “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 centres. 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.

Statement of the Problem

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 analyse 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.

Research Questions

The research work seeks to find answers to the following questions:

- i. How does the Nigerian Compass and The Hope Newspaper report communities' news?
- ii. Type(s) of news about rural communities have the highest reportage in the Nigerian Compass and The Hope Newspapers?
- iii. What is the level of prominence given to the various news stories?
- iv. Does The Nigerian Compass permit opinions or views about the rural communities to be published in their dailies?

Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is press coverage of rural development news: a study of Nigerian compass and the hope newspapers. The specific objectives are;

- i. To examine the reporting style and content of community news in the Nigerian Compass and The Hope Newspapers
- ii. To identify the types of news about rural communities that receive the highest coverage in the Nigerian Compass and The Hope Newspapers
- iii. To determine the level of prominence given to various news stories about rural communities in the Nigerian Compass and The Hope Newspapers.
- iv. To investigate whether the Nigerian Compass permits the publication of opinions or views about rural communities in its dailies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

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. Development is a 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 though 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):

- i. **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 editorialisation. There is neither addition nor subtraction of the facts of the story. No padding, no shading of weight or wedding.
- ii. **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 quality as hard news. Because they are usually laddened with so many figures and facts, they may be boring to the readers if not skillfully written.
- iii. **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.
- iv. **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.
- v. **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.
- vi. **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.
- vii. **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:

- i. It informs that is, it keeps one-up-to-date
- ii. It educates that is, it broadens and deepens one's perceptive
- iii. It persuades that is, it sells goods and services, political candidates and opinions
- iv. 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:

- i. Surveillance of the environment (policing and alerting members of a community to dangers and opportunities in the environment).
- ii. Correlation of parts of society in responding to the environment.
- iii. 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 buy 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

- i. An approach, group media has helped marginal groups to speak to one another to articulate their thoughts and feelings;

- ii. 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:
- iii. Better planning and programme formulation by consulting the people and activity involving them in making decisions that will affect them;
- iv. 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,
- v. 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;
- vi. Improved training through communication media to bring alive new ideas and techniques and energies programmes of training and human resources development;
- vii. 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

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. 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). 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. The Nigerian Compass and The Hope Newspapers were used for this study. The newspapers editions from the period of May 2010 to April 2011 (1 year) would be analysed giving a total of 730 editions. The two newspapers, Nigerian Compass and The Hope

Newspapers were purposively chosen because they are both national newspapers. 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 analysed giving a total of 48 editions as the sample. For this study, the categories of analysis of the content of the Newspapers are types, prominence and slant. Statistical tables and simple percentages would be used to analyse 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

Results

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

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 communities news stories have pages from Monday to Friday, as observed, but most of the news in this pages 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 7: 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 study revealed significant differences in the reporting style and content of rural community news between the Nigerian Compass and The Hope newspapers. The Hope Newspaper consistently published more stories about rural communities compared to the Nigerian Compass during the period under review. Both newspapers primarily used a straight news format for reporting rural development news. However, the Nigerian Compass showed a more limited range of reporting styles, with few reports published as features, opinions/comments, and letters to the editor, photographs, or cartoons. Notably, the Nigerian Compass did not publish any editorials on rural community issues, focusing instead on national and international topics. The Hope Newspaper, while also predominantly using the straight news format, showed slightly more diversity in its reporting styles, albeit with limited attention

to features, editorials, opinions/comments, and letters to the editor, photographs, and cartoons. This finding suggests that both newspapers could benefit from diversifying their reporting styles to provide more comprehensive coverage of rural community issues.

Types of News Coverage: The study identified distinct patterns in the types of rural community news that received the highest coverage in each newspaper. In the Nigerian Compass, crime and disaster-related stories dominated the coverage, while notably absent were reports on religion, sports, and entertainment in rural areas. This focus on negative news could potentially skew public perception of rural communities. In contrast, The Hope newspaper prioritized coverage of development projects in rural areas, indicating a more positive approach to rural news. The Hope also gave significant attention to agriculture and business news, followed by political news. However, it's worth noting that health-related stories were absent from The Hope's coverage, highlighting a potential gap in reporting on crucial rural issues. These findings suggest that while both newspapers cover rural news, they have different priorities in terms of the types of stories they emphasize.

Prominence of Rural News: The study revealed varying levels of prominence given to rural community news in both newspapers. In the Nigerian Compass, the majority of rural news reports were published on inside pages, with no reports appearing on the back page. The newspaper reserved its back page for articles, features, and comments, suggesting that rural news was not considered a priority for high-visibility placement. The Hope newspaper showed a slightly different pattern, with 18 reports published on the front page, indicating some level of prominence given to rural news. However, like the Nigerian Compass, The Hope did not publish rural news on its back page, dedicating this space to sports and comments. In terms of column space, the Nigerian Compass tended to allocate more space (5-6 columns) to rural news when it was covered, while The Hope most frequently used 1-2 columns for rural news stories. This suggests that when the Nigerian Compass did cover rural news, it provided more in-depth coverage, while The Hope's coverage was more frequent but briefer.

Publication of Opinions on Rural Communities: The findings indicate that the Nigerian Compass had a limited approach to publishing opinions or views about rural communities. While the newspaper did publish some opinion pieces and comments, these were few in number compared to straight news reports. The lack of editorials on rural issues further underscores this limited engagement with rural community perspectives. This approach suggests that the Nigerian Compass may not be fully leveraging its platform to facilitate public discourse on rural issues. In contrast, while The Hope also primarily focused on straight news reporting, it showed slightly more openness to publishing diverse viewpoints, including features, editorials, and opinions, albeit in limited numbers. This finding highlights an opportunity for both newspapers, particularly the Nigerian Compass, to expand their role in fostering public dialogue about rural community issues by more actively soliciting and publishing diverse opinions and perspectives from and about rural areas.

Summary of Findings

The study has been able to reveal the followings;

1. Rural development news is covered, but the amount of coverage is minimal compared to other types of content like advertisements, sports, foreign, or urban/federal development news. Reports are largely presented as straight news in standard

columns/paragraphs, often without in-depth analysis or storytelling. Coverage lacks depth and balance, indicating inadequate attention to rural development issues. Limited visual (pictorial) content accompanies rural news stories; photos and visual emphasis are lacking.

2. A significant portion of rural news, particularly in the *Nigerian Compass*, is crime and disaster-related, which creates a narrow portrayal of rural life. Some coverage exists around political, agricultural/business, and educational issues, which are central to rural life; however, the depth and frequency remain insufficient.
3. Most rural development news is buried in inside pages, with no placement on the back pages and very few on the front pages — reflecting low editorial priority. Most rural news stories are brief instead of extended coverage, further showing a lack of prominence. Coverage is limited to 1–4 inches of newspaper space, indicating minimal visual or narrative emphasis.
4. While there is some space for letters-to-the-editor and opinion columns, it is limited and insufficient. This suggests that the newspapers have not fully embraced their role as platforms for community voices or public discourse on rural issues.

Conclusion

This research critically examined how *The Nigerian Compass* and *The Hope* newspapers reported rural development news in Nigeria. The findings clearly reveal a pattern of imbalanced and inaccurate coverage, characterized by the underreporting of rural issues and the marginalization of rural communities in media narratives. The study concludes that both newspapers—and by extension, the Nigerian media—tend to give minimal attention and preference to rural development news, thereby failing in their social responsibility to promote inclusive development. Predominantly, coverage on rural development is limited to crime and disaster stories, while other vital aspects such as entertainment, interviews, religion, and sports—areas that resonate with rural dwellers—are often overlooked. This selective reporting not only distorts the rural narrative but also contributes to the growing sense of neglect felt by rural populations, particularly the youth. This neglect arguably fuels rural-urban migration as young people seek visibility and opportunities in urban centers. Furthermore, the study finds that *The Nigerian Compass*, in particular, does not prioritize rural development stories in its prominent pages, such as the front or back pages. Instead, these spaces are reserved for national or political events, often relegating rural stories to less visible sections or omitting them entirely.

Recommendations

- i. First of all, journalists in Newspaper organizations should be sensitized and conscience through training and retraining programmes, 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.

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