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## Folk media in the age of social media: Exploring the potentials of folk media for Botswanan development

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### Abstract

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the role that traditional or indigenous media, commonly referred to as folk media, can still play in promoting development efforts in this age of social media. Folk media serve as communication tool for the dissemination of information and enhancing development. Folk music, folklore dance and other artistic performances are carriers of messages which can be injected with developmental messages. A country like Botswana with a number of rural communities presents an avenue where folk media can enhance development. As a country with different ethnic groups, it is almost impossible to find an ethnic group without its own distinct traditional media and artistic expression. With this in view, this paper from a more wholistic perspective explores the potentials of folk media in facilitating development efforts in Botswana. The study leans primarily on case studies and extant literature to carry-out the study primary objective.

**Keywords:** Folk media, development, Botswana, communication, traditional media

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Understanding the Concepts of Development and Folk Media

A simple terminology that describes the advancement of a human society is development (Smith, 2019) <sup>[18]</sup>. The term development is commonly used to describe not only the physical or infrastructural improvement of a society but also the mental transformation and over-all development of its members and sectors. Development is "both a physical reality and a state of mind in which society has secured the means for obtaining a better life" (Todaro & Smith, 2006, p. 22) <sup>[14]</sup>. There is almost no aspect of human life and the society where the concept of development is not practicable or applicable. In fact, humans by default desire growth and development, and this explains the reason behind the endless agitations in both developing and developed countries of the world. While a variety of factors may have necessitated these endless outcries, the common denominator in all these agitations is development. Development is relative; for developing countries, development could mean provision of social amenities and adequate infrastructures while developed countries on the other hand may consider development as an improvement of a section of their constitution to allow for same sex marriage, abortion and many other issues that pertain to human liberty. These different approaches to societal issues regardless of their peculiarities still fall under the large umbrella of development. This clearly shows that the nature of development is multifaceted thus, providing a universal definition that addresses or encapsulates all angles of development may be difficult. Nevertheless, a common feature that many scholars incorporate into their definitions of development is the idea that "development is a process" (Todaro & Smith, 2006, p. 22) <sup>[14]</sup>. And it is through this process the society ensures growth in wealth acquisition, mental enrichment and better living conditions of all the people. The society uses a combination of social, economic and institutional processes as the means to acquire better living conditions.

Gran (1983) <sup>[5]</sup> defines development as a social and practical process which aims at the liberation of human potential so that people acquire the maximum socially feasible and practical control over all the available resources needed for the realization of basic human needs and security. Similarly, Burkey (1993) <sup>[4]</sup> defines it as a process by which an

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individual develops self-respect and becomes more self-confident, self-reliant, cooperative and tolerant to others through becoming aware of his/her shortcomings as well as his/her potential for positive change. This takes place through working with others, acquiring new knowledge, and active participation in the economic, social and political development of their communities” (p. 35). This definition of development according to Burkey is slightly different from Gran’s definition. Development here is seen as a process through which people become aware of their capabilities, acquire knowledge and work collectively to meet their abstract needs. For Burkey, development apart from being a process of personal growth also involves acquiring new knowledge, skills, and also becoming more self-aware, self-confident, and self-reliant. This suggests that development is not just about external factors like economic growth, but also about personal growth and empowerment. This definition goes further to show that development involves working with others; it is a social process that improves both personal growth and community advancement. This implies that development is not just an individual process, but is also about building stronger and more cooperative communities. For development to be an effective one, cooperate participation is essential.

Like Korten, Burkey’s definition also emphasizes that development is not a passive process, but requires active participation in the economic, social, and political life of one’s community. This suggests that development is not just about individual attitudes and behaviors, but also about collective action and engagement. Furthermore, an effective development is made possible through the fundamental stage of self-realization. The change a society or individual envisage is not possible outside an awareness of one’s strengths and weaknesses. Positive change is possible when shortcomings are admitted. This implies that development is also a process of self-realization and not limited to just achieving success, but also about acknowledging and learning from one’s failures and challenges.

Also, Korten (1990) <sup>[7]</sup> defines development as a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations” (p. 57). Korten’s definition clearly shows that development is a process. It is not a static state but an ongoing process of both change and improvement. His definition suggests that societies and individuals are constantly evolving or changing hence, development must be viewed as a dynamic and adaptive process. In the same vein, this definition further stresses that development is not just about increasing or accumulating material wealth, but also involves building the social and human capital for sustainable growth over the long term. Hence, development has to do with investing in education, health care, and social infrastructure, without ignoring a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship. Development aims to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in quality of life: This underscores the importance of development being both sustainable and equitable. Sustainable development means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Justly distributed development means ensuring that the benefits of development are shared fairly among all members of society, including marginalized groups. An effective

development answers to local aspirations. These aspirations drive development therefore it is necessary for development to remain a response to indigenous needs and priorities. Development cannot be imposed from outside, but must be grounded in an understanding of local contexts and cultures.

### 1.2 Development as a Process

All the definitions provided above share a common ground that development is a process. And aside from the definitions provided in this work, several other definitions express development as a process. Going with Gran’s definition (1983), he, in fact sees development as “a social and practical process.” However, for the definitions provided, each definition emphasizes the idea that development involves a series of changes over time, rather than a static state. They suggest that development is not just about achieving specific goals or outcomes, but is also about building capacity, learning, and adapting to changing circumstances. The definitions highlight that development involves not only economic growth, but also social, environmental, and personal growth. They also suggest that development is a holistic process, involving individual and collective actions, social and political engagement, and cultural relevance.

### 1.3 Concept of Folk Media

Since development is a process that involves continuous growth, change, and improvement, it requires the use of various channels and means to drive the process forward. One of such channels that can be used in driving development is folk media. “Folk media refer to the vehicle the common people or rural folk employ for the delivery of their messages. Folk dance, folk music, folklore, should therefore of necessity be immense value as communication tools, collectively called folk media, to anyone involved in the dissemination of information to the rural community” (Kodavath, 2015) <sup>[6]</sup>. From the forgoing, we see that Folk media are traditional forms of communication expressed by people of local communities usually grounded in the people’s culture and transmitted verbally. Aspects of folk media include traditional/folk songs, dances, drama, storytelling, and other forms of artistic expression.

Traditional folk media is not just confined to dance and music, but also includes art and crafts. Traditional folk media originated as a consequence of people’s need to express themselves. Oftentimes, people often limit the understanding of folk media to just dance and music meanwhile other components of traditional media are Art and crafts. Communication has always been important to every dispensation of man thus, apart from the aesthetic pleasure indigenous people derived from folk media, they were also used for communication purposes. This is why communication existed even before the advent of formal education and the mainstream media, people relied on their own creative abilities to communicate ideas, values, and beliefs to others. Through music, dance, art, and crafts, people could convey messages about their way of life, their struggles, and their aspirations.

In some cases, traditional folk media also served practical purposes. For example, folk art and crafts often served as a means of producing goods for everyday use, such as clothing, pottery, and baskets. These objects were often made using locally available materials and techniques that had been developed over time.

African communities have always been inventive and deliberate in creating their unique media. Traditional media has always been in existence long before the advent of the mainstream and the new media which accounts for why diverse ethnic groups in African society (During pre-colonial era) had distinct forms of art and crafts which served as mediums for expressing cultural identity, as well as creating practical and symbolic items that were both aesthetically pleasing and functional. Folk art in different ethnic groups in Botswana encompassed various forms such as symbolic message, hairstyling, weaving, embroidery, and woodcarving, to mention a few. Across these cultures, these art forms were passed down from one generation to another, serving as a means of safeguarding and commemorating the history and customs of a particular community.

The multiethnic nature of Botswana provides for a variety of traditional artistic expressions. Traditional media have been in existence in Botswana for a very long time with different ethnic groups having their unique artistic expressions. Traditional or folk media was and is still being used as a medium of communication, particularly in remote parts of the country where the modern media of communication has either less penetration. According to Mathiyazhagan, Kaur, Ravindhar, and Devrani (2015) <sup>[9]</sup>, "Despite the revolution of modern media including; new media such as internet, social networking such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp etc., the traditional media yet occupy some space in the delivery of messages to a large number of people in the country. The traditional media are defined as "those media which attempt to communicate a message to a particular group of target audiences in a given time in local dialect with entertainment Mathiyazhagan *et al.* (2015) <sup>[9]</sup>. This definition gives a description of the long-standing presence of traditional or folk media in Botswana, which has been utilized as a means of communication, particularly in rural areas with limited access to modern media.

Despite the advent of modern media, traditional media still occupy a significant space in conveying messages to large audiences in the country. This observation suggests that folk media has the potential to enhance development efforts in Botswana and beyond. By utilizing traditional media channels, development initiatives can engage with local communities in ways that are culturally appropriate and accessible. The use of folk media can also preserve cultural heritage and facilitate social and political mobilization, thereby contributing to sustainable development. This paper will explore these potential benefits of folk media and examine how it can be harnessed to support development initiatives in Botswana.

## 2. Folk Media in Enhancing Development

Chinua Achebe often highlighted the use of folk media in his novels to illustrate the importance of storytelling and oral traditions in African culture. Achebe, C. (1958) <sup>[2]</sup>. In his most famous novel "Things Fall Apart," Achebe portrays the Igbo people's use of folk media in various forms, such as songs, proverbs, and folktales. For instance, Achebe portrays the character of Okonkwo's father, Unoka, as a musician who plays the flute and engages in storytelling. He uses music and stories to entertain and educate the members of his community. The novel also features several instances of proverbs, such as "when a man says yes, his chi says yes also," that are used to convey wisdom and communicate cultural values. The skillful inclusion of Igbo folk media in

Achebe's literatures suggests that they are forms of communication in African culture that can be used to promote education, cultural understanding, and development.

Mathiyazhagan, *et al.* (2015) <sup>[9]</sup>, while focusing on India in their discussion on traditional media of communication express an idea that applies also to the Botswana society. They mention that in a developing country, traditional folk media have been reckoned as successful mass-motivators. During the years preceding the advent of electronic media, the traditional folk media not only reflected the joys and sorrows of people, but also inspired the masses. Mass media have extended the area of coverage of a folk performance, while traditional folk media, with their inspiring colours and costumes, dance and music; have enriched the content of the mass media channels. In addition, utilization of traditional media for communication revives culture. Systematic organization of people's performances makes the motivational work more community-based with the objectives of social and economic betterment and cultural revival.

Kodavath (2015) <sup>[6]</sup> mentions that contemporary theories of cognition and communication can be used to explain the role of folk media as complex, non-formal methods of educating people and changing behaviors. The function of folk media is consistent with Bandura's social learning (Cognition) theory, which states that most behaviors are learned through modeling. This theory explains that vicarious learning from others is a powerful teacher of attitudes and behavior. Bandura believed that individuals learn not only in classrooms but also by observing role models in everyday life, including characters in movies and television programs. Accordingly, folk media performers are role models from whom people learn. The various types of folk media are used as primers that provide the basis for residents of rural communities to discuss and diagnose their socio cultural and health situations and that enable them to take steps to find solutions to those problems. The role of folk media further subscribes to Rogers's communication and innovations theory, which explains how an innovation can be sustained within communities or groups of people after it has been adopted by the leadership of that community or group.

As noted by Kodavath (2015) <sup>[6]</sup> that "folk media performers are role models from whom people learn" we see that Folk media performers, including musicians, dancers, and actors, can play a vital role in enhancing development efforts in practical ways. These performers can use folk media as a tool for promoting community engagement. For instance, they can use traditional songs and dances to educate communities on important issues such as health, agriculture, and environmental conservation. Through these performances, community members become aware of problems then learn about different approaches to solving problems and take steps towards addressing them. Let us take the following account into consideration:

### 2.1 Role of Folk Media: A Brief Account of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in addressing Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria

Okorie (2019) <sup>[19]</sup> expressed a notable account of how folk media was used to enhance development in Nigeria is seen in how folk media performers used art to enhance development through the use of theater in addressing issues

of gender-based violence (GBV) in Nigeria. In 2014, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) partnered with the Nigerian Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development to launch a nationwide campaign to address GBV. As part of this campaign, the UNDP worked with local theater groups to develop a series of plays that addressed issues such as domestic violence, child marriage, and female genital mutilation.

The success of the UNDP in addressing GBV through the use of folk media was evident in the program's ability to reach a large audience, including those in remote areas where modern media has less penetration. The estimated audience of over five million demonstrates the effectiveness of using locally relevant and culturally appropriate methods of communication to enhance development.

Moreover, the use of folk media in addressing GBV went beyond simply raising awareness. Through community dialogues that followed the plays, audience members were able to engage in meaningful discussions around the issues raised and identify solutions to the problems. This approach allowed for community members to take ownership of the issue and become active participants in the fight against GBV.

Overall, the use of folk media in enhancing development in Botswana has the potential to bring about positive change at both the individual and community levels. By using traditional art forms and locally relevant messages, folk media performers and practitioners can promote cultural preservation, behavior change, and social cohesion, ultimately contributing to the overall development of Botswana.

## 2.2 An Account of the Chipko Movement in India

According to Shiva (1989) <sup>[13]</sup>, another instance of how folk media was used to enhance development is seen in the use of theater in addressing issues of environmental degradation in India. The Chipko movement, which began in the 1970s in the Himalayan region of India, was a nonviolent social movement aimed at protecting forests and the environment. The movement gained momentum through the use of folk media, including songs, plays, and street theater, to raise awareness about the environmental destruction caused by deforestation and to promote conservation and sustainable development practices.

The Chipko movement proved beyond reasonable doubt to be a successful approach in protecting forests and promoting environmental awareness. In fact, its success extended to other parts of India and inspired similar movements around the world. The use of folk media in the movement demonstrated the effectiveness of using culturally relevant media to raise awareness and engage communities in promoting social and environmental change.

## 2.3 Application and Recommendations

The use of folk media in addressing GBV in Nigeria and in the Chipko movement highlights the importance of using locally relevant and culturally appropriate methods of communication to enhance development. It recognizes the fact that traditional media can still occupy a significant space in the delivery of messages to a large number of people, particularly in rural areas where modern media has less penetration. (Ogunrinade & Akomolafe, 2021) <sup>[12]</sup>.

These different accounts of how folk media has been used in the past can further be updated or improved on for greater

efficiency and productivity. The existing developmental problem of illiteracy in some rural parts of Botswana can be addressed by applying the same strategies used by UNDP in addressing GBV and for the Chipko movement in India, but with a more specific or unique approach that is peculiar to societies plagued by the problem of illiteracy. For instance, in the case of addressing gender inequality in Botswana, traditional media such as storytelling, puppetry, dance, and local songs can be used to, promote gender-based education and create awareness of the importance of gender equality in a way that is culturally relevant to the people. But all of these can be annexed in Botswana using the following:

- The use of folk media in solving development-related problems in Botswana begins with first identifying the target audience: The first step is to identify the group of people that the campaign will be targeted towards.
- Furthermore, it is essential to also pay attention to developing messages in a way and manner that is culturally appropriate. Folk media messages must be culturally appropriate and relevant to the target audience. The messages must be developed in a way that will be easily understood and relatable to the audience.
- Select the appropriate folk media: The appropriate folk media for the target audience must be selected. This could include puppetry, storytelling, songs, dance, or drama, depending on the cultural preferences and interests of the target audience.
- Train folk media performers: Folk media performers must be trained to deliver the messages effectively. The performers should be fluent in the local dialects of the target audience and have an understanding of the cultural norms and values of the people they will be interacting with.
- Conduct community engagements: The folk media performances should be conducted in local communities, with community members encouraged to attend. Following the performances, community dialogues should be conducted to allow the audience to discuss the issues raised in the performances and identify solutions.
- The job of developing the mental state of target audience is not complete without evaluating the impact of the programme. It is important for evaluate the impact of development campaign through feedback from community members.

## 3. Precautionary Measures in Application

It is necessary to draw a line of caution as supported by scholar alike that “the traditional folk performances like ritualistic dances, religious songs or mythology based rural plays, though highly popular, have proved unsuitable to absorb and reflect new messages on population, health or hygiene. Communicators, therefore, have to test different categories of folk performances to identify the ones that are flexible enough to absorb development messages to meet the contemporary needs. Flexibility is the most important factor which determines the viability of a folk medium for rural communication.

The cautionary note mentioned highlights an important consideration when using folk media for development purposes. While traditional forms of folk performances such as ritualistic dances, religious songs, or mythology-based rural plays may be highly popular and deeply ingrained in

local cultures, they may not necessarily be suitable for conveying modern development messages related to population, health, hygiene or other development issues (Abegunrin, 2017) <sup>[1]</sup>.

Therefore, communicators and development practitioners need to carefully assess different categories of folk media to identify those that are flexible enough to absorb new messages and meet contemporary needs. Flexibility is a key factor that determines the viability of a folk medium for rural communication. For example, puppetry, storytelling, and drama may be more suitable for conveying health or hygiene messages, while music and dance could be more effective for addressing social or cultural issues. It is essential to identify the right type of folk media that resonates with local communities and can effectively communicate the intended message.

In addition, P.M. Kulkarni (2010) <sup>[8]</sup> state that it is important to adapt and modify traditional folk media to fit the context and needs of the target audience. This can involve incorporating modern themes and messages into traditional performances or updating traditional folk forms to reflect contemporary issues. By taking a flexible and adaptive approach to using folk media for development communication, practitioners can effectively engage local communities, promote understanding and awareness of important issues, and contribute to sustainable development efforts.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the use of folk media can play a significant role in enhancing development in various ways. It can raise awareness and promote understanding of important issues, encourage community participation and action, preserve cultural heritage and promote cultural diversity, and provide economic opportunities for local artists and performers. However, to achieve the desired impact, it is crucial to involve local communities in the planning and implementation process and tailor messages and media to meet the specific needs and cultural contexts of target audiences. With proper planning and implementation, folk media can effectively communicate messages and engage audiences who may be difficult to reach through traditional means of communication, contributing to sustainable development efforts in diverse societies.

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