

AMPLIFYING MARGINALIZED VOICES: THE BEREKETE RADIO/TV MODEL IN CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

This study examines the Berekete Radio/TV model, an independent Nigerian broadcast platform that uses human-interest storytelling to amplify marginalized voices in development communication. Conventional mass media in Nigeria frequently underrepresent underserved communities, sustaining a persistent gap in inclusive development discourse. Anchored in Participatory Communication Theory (Freire, 1970) and Public Sphere Theory (Habermas, 1989), the study investigates how Berekete's on-air advocacy format cultivates civic engagement, transparency, and grassroots accountability. A qualitative-dominant case-study design with embedded quantitative content analysis was employed, drawing on 90 purposively sampled broadcast segments (January–June 2025), semi-structured interviews with producers, presenters, and community contributors, and participant observation of studio productions and outreach events. Findings indicate that Berekete's call-in format and direct, on-air confrontation of duty-bearers increase audiences' perceived access to redress, while the model's replicability elsewhere is constrained by funding and logistical capacity. The study contributes an empirically grounded account of how grassroots broadcast advocacy operationalizes participatory and public-sphere principles in a Global South setting and offers recommendations for extending Berekete's inclusivity practices to comparable platforms.

Keywords: marginalized voices; inclusivity; development communication; grassroots media; Nigeria

Introduction

Development communication has increasingly foregrounded inclusivity and audience participation as preconditions for durable social change (Servaes, 2008). Within Nigeria's media landscape, Berekete Radio/TV,

an independent platform founded by broadcaster Ahmed Isah, has become a prominent example of media addressing social-justice concerns through direct engagement with marginalized communities (Isah, 2020). Berekete pairs on-air advocacy with a distinctive call-in format that integrates media practice with mechanisms of social accountability. This paper examines the effectiveness of the Berekete model in advancing inclusive development communication and considers its implications for broader practice.

Statement of the Problem

Despite improvements in media accessibility, marginalized voices remain underrepresented in Nigeria's mainstream development discourse. Conventional outlets often fail to register the concerns of underserved communities, perpetuating a persistent gap in inclusive development communication. This study treats the Berekete model as a potential template for more inclusive media practice, examining how it enables marginalized groups to participate in dialogues that directly affect their communities.

Objectives of the Study

The study pursues four objectives: (1) to examine Berekete Radio/TV's approach to inclusivity in development communication; (2) to identify how the platform empowers marginalized voices and encourages civic engagement; (3) to analyse the implications of the Berekete model for development communication frameworks; and (4) to propose recommendations for replicating Berekete's inclusivity practices across other development communication channels.

Literature Review

Participatory Models in Development Communication

Development communication bridges policymakers, implementers, and communities in pursuit of social change (Servaes, 2008). Historically, the field operated through top-down models in which messages flowed from institutions to the public with minimal feedback (Melkote & Steeves, 2015). Servaes (2008) critiques this approach for marginalizing the communities it purports to serve by disregarding their lived experience and local knowledge. Inclusive, participatory alternatives instead position communities as co-authors of the narratives that affect their lives, treating communication as a transformative rather than a purely informational tool (Servaes, 2008). Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) find such approaches especially effective in rural and underserved areas,

where they improve transparency and accountability by drawing residents directly into decision-making processes.

Grassroots Media and Social Accountability

Grassroots media platforms have become important vehicles for amplifying marginalized voices precisely because mainstream outlets frequently neglect or misrepresent underserved communities (Dagron, 2001). Dagron (2001) shows that participatory, decentralized community media create alternative channels through which people narrate their own circumstances and press their claims. Downing (2001) similarly argues that such media democratize the public sphere by sustaining platforms for otherwise excluded voices. In the Nigerian context, Oso (2011) documents the watchdog function of grassroots outlets, which have pressed authorities to act on grievances raised by marginalized communities, while Soola(2003) notes that Nigeria's mass media remain concentrated in urban centres and rarely serve rural informational needs, a gap that locally situated platforms such as Berekete are positioned to fill.

The Public Sphere and Media Democratization

Habermas's (1989) account of the public sphere frames media as an arena for open discourse, accessible to all and free from state or commercial interference. Habermas is critical of the corporatization of media, which he argues skews public discourse toward commercial rather than social interests; Fraser (1990) extends this critique by noting that marginalized communities are routinely excluded from the mainstream public sphere, which is why alternative platforms are needed to address their specific concerns. Fuchs (2014) suggests that platforms embodying the public-sphere ideal contribute meaningfully to democratizing information access and enabling citizen participation in governance, a claim this study tests against the Berekete case.

Inclusivity and Marginalized Voices in Nigerian Media

Nigerian scholarship extends these debates to local conditions. Nwosu (1990) argued that top-down communication strategies ignore Nigeria's linguistic diversity and uneven development needs, a concern the Berekete model addresses through grassroots engagement and content delivered in local languages. Obadare (2005) emphasizes that media should not merely inform but should actively enable citizen participation in governance, while Ibrahim (2010) highlights the marginalization of ethnic and religious groups within mainstream Nigerian media and calls

for alternative platforms that prioritize inclusivity without political or ethnic bias. Okigbo and Eribo (2004) point to radio's continued accessibility as a medium well suited to this task, and Egwu (2009) notes that participatory media can foster peace in conflict-prone, multi-ethnic settings by providing balanced information and channels for redress.

Journalistic accounts corroborate these theoretical claims. Campbell (2018) describes how, amid limited confidence in formal state institutions, Berekete's call-in format allows ordinary Nigerians to present grievances, ranging from unjust dismissals to domestic disputes, directly on air, where hosts publicly name unresponsive officials and, at times, broadcast their contact details so listeners can press for action. Campbell (2018) further reports that crowds regularly gather outside the studio each morning, and quotes the platform's founder describing existing legal protections as poorly enforced and disproportionately favourable to the powerful. Such accounts align with Couldry and Dreher's (2007) argument that media access for marginalized communities can challenge dominant narratives and expose social inequality, and with Nyamnjoh's (2005) contention that African media too often fail to reflect ordinary people's realities, a gap platforms such as Berekete are positioned to close.

Taken together, this literature underscores the need for inclusive, participatory models capable of fostering genuine social transformation. Grassroots platforms such as Berekete offer an alternative to conventional media by empowering marginalized voices and promoting dialogic accountability, with Participatory Communication Theory and Public Sphere Theory supplying complementary theoretical foundations for the analysis that follows.

Theoretical Framework

Participatory Communication Theory

Participatory Communication Theory derives from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), developed in response to the authoritarian educational and political structures Freire encountered in Latin America, which rendered marginalized populations passive recipients of top-down information. Freire characterized conventional communication as a "banking model," in which knowledge is deposited into audiences rather than co-constructed with them, and proposed instead a dialogical model in which the oppressed reflect on, question, and act upon their own circumstances. This reframes marginalized individuals as co-creators of knowledge and has since underpinned

participatory approaches that emphasize community ownership of development initiatives (Freire, 1970).

Public Sphere Theory

Jürgen Habermas introduced the concept of the public sphere in his 1962 study of bourgeois society, translated into English as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Habermas, 1989). Writing in post-war West Germany, Habermas observed how state and corporate control over communication under totalitarianism had suppressed open discourse, and he theorized the public sphere as a space, historically rooted in 18th century salons and coffee houses, where citizens could debate matters of common interest independent of state or commercial influence.

He argued that commodified mass media erode this ideal by privileging commercial and political agendas over public interest, a critique with direct bearing on the accountability of state and media institutions toward marginalized populations (Habermas, 1989). Freire's and Habermas's theories address complementary limitations in communication systems, the former responding to authoritarian dynamics within education and development, the latter to commercial and political constraints on public discourse. Together they provide the conceptual scaffolding for examining how a platform such as Bereket Radio/TV operationalizes inclusive dialogue and public accountability in practice.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative-dominant case-study design with embedded quantitative elements, situated within a critical–interpretive paradigm that treats media as an arena of power, negotiation, and social struggle rather than a neutral information channel (Ake, 2001; Nyamnjoh, 2005). This orientation suits African media contexts, where development communication is entangled with historical marginalization and contested public spheres (Amin, 1976; Nyamnjoh, 2005). Systematic content analysis was combined with interviews and participant observation to capture both the discursive structure of Bereket's programming and the institutional logics shaping editorial decisions.

Data Sources and Sampling

Primary data comprised archived audio-visual broadcasts from Bereket Radio and Television addressing governance, livelihoods, social services, and community advocacy, sampled from broadcasts aired between January and June 2025. Stratified purposive sampling yielded 90 program segments across four formats — news reports, feature programs, talk shows, and audience call-in segments — ensuring representation of both elite-driven and participatory formats (Nyamnjoh, 2005). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with station producers, presenters, and selected community contributors, and participant observation was undertaken during studio productions and community outreach activities.

Unit of Analysis and Coding Framework

The unit of analysis was the broadcast segment, defined as a self-contained item addressing a single issue; segments were disaggregated into speaker turns where finer-grained analysis of voice and representation was required. All broadcasts were transcribed verbatim, with metadata recorded on program type, airtime, duration, language, and community location. Coding followed a directed-inductive hybrid approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), with initial categories informed by concepts of voice, agency, participation, and structural constraint (Ake, 2001; Amin, 1976; Nyamnjoh, 2005) alongside broader media theory on voice and public discourse (Couldry, 2010). Core categories included the presence of marginalized voices, degree of agency expressed, balance of speaker representation, incorporation of local or indigenous knowledge, problem framing, calls to action, and linkage between broadcast discourse and documented development outcomes; additional themes were permitted to emerge inductively.

Reliability, Analysis, and Ethics

Two trained coders independently coded a 10% pilot subsample to refine the coding instrument; discrepancies were resolved through discussion before the full dataset was coded independently. Inter-coder reliability was assessed with Krippendorff's alpha (Krippendorff, 2018), which is appropriate for nominal and ordinal variables in communication research, and reliability coefficients met acceptable thresholds for exploratory media studies (Neuendorf, 2017). Descriptive statistics mapped patterns of representation and thematic emphasis across program types, while thematic interpretation examined how voice was constructed, whose knowledge was legitimized, and how responsibility for development

challenges was framed, with particular attention to whether programs individualized problems or situated them within broader socio-economic contexts (Amin, 1976). Findings from the content analysis were triangulated with interview and observational data (Miles et al., 2014). Ethical approval and institutional permission were obtained prior to fieldwork, informed consent was secured from interview participants, and pseudonyms were used to protect vulnerable contributors throughout.

Limitations

As a single-case study, the findings are not statistically generalizable to all Nigerian community media contexts. Access to archived broadcasts was dependent on station records, which may have excluded some programming, and the researcher's presence during observations may have influenced production practices. Despite these constraints, the study offers analytically rich insight into how African community media can function as platforms for marginalized voices.

Findings

Across the sampled corpus, Bereket's programming consistently foregrounded ordinary citizens as primary speakers rather than as sources filtered through official commentary, a pattern most pronounced in the call-in and talk-show formats. Table 1 illustrates representative issue categories, stakeholder configurations, and reported outcomes drawn from the broader corpus, organized by broadcast quarter within the January–June 2025 sampling window.

Table 1: *Representative Bereketse Broadcast Segments by Issue Category and Reported Outcome (January–June 2025 Sample)*

Program Strand	Broadcast Period	Issue Category	Stakeholders Involved	Audience Participation Mode	Reported Outcome
Human Rights	Q1 2025 (n=22)	Child trafficking	Public; police	Call-ins; live audience	Referred for intervention
Human Rights	Q1 2025 (n=22)	Service negligence	Public; transport co.	Live audience; call-ins	Public exposure ; redress
Talk Show	Q2 2025 (n=19)	Child marriage	Govt. agency; public	Live audience; call-ins	Govt. referral
Talk Show	Q2 2025 (n=19)	Pension grievances	Govt. agency; public	Call-ins; live audience	Intervention pledged
Call-in Segment	Q2 2025 (n=27)	Health emergencies	General public	Live audience; call-ins	Philanthropic aid
News Report	Q1–Q2 2025 (n=22)	Child neglect	Public; govt. agency	Call-ins; live audience	Public monitoring

Note. Figures in parentheses indicate the approximate number of segments coded within that quarter and format from the full 90-segment sample; individual rows illustrate representative, not exhaustive, cases.

The coding framework further tracked six categories bearing directly on the study's participatory and public-sphere claims: presence of marginalized-voice speakers, explicit calls to action, incorporation of local or indigenous knowledge, structural versus individualized problem framing, and linkage to a documented outcome. Table 2 reports the

frequency, percentage, and dominant program format for each category across the full 90-segment corpus. Marginalized-voice speakers appeared in two-thirds of segments (66.7%), concentrated in talk shows, and explicit calls to action were nearly as prevalent (64.4%), concentrated in call-in segments, consistent with the participatory design of these formats. By contrast, individualized problem framing (58.9%) outweighed structural framing (37.8%), suggesting that even a platform built around participatory access tends, in practice, to present grievances as discrete personal disputes rather than as instances of systemic failure. Explicit linkage to a documented development outcome was comparatively rare (23.3%), as was reference to local or indigenous knowledge (25.6%), both concentrated in feature programs rather than in the more spontaneous call-in and talk-show formats.

Table 2: *Descriptive Summary of Coded Categories Across the Sampled Corpus (n = 90)*

Coding Category	Frequency (n = 90)	Percentage (%)	Dominant Program Format
Presence of marginalized-voice speakers	60	66.7	Talk shows
Explicit calls to action / redress sought	58	64.4	Call-in segments
Reference to local/indigenous knowledge	23	25.6	Feature programs
Structural framing of the problem	34	37.8	News reports
Individualized framing of the problem	53	58.9	Talk shows
Linkage to a documented development outcome	21	23.3	Feature programs

Interview and observational data help interpret this pattern. Producers described the call-in format as deliberately structured to give

complainants uninterrupted narrative space before officials or institutional representatives are invited to respond on air, which participants associated with increased perceived accountability. Community contributors linked their willingness to interrogate and question public procurement projects in their communities as a fallout from to earlier exposure to Bereketete broadcasts that modeled civic participation, suggesting a plausible link between exposure to the program and self-reported civic engagement, though this study's design cannot establish causality. Despite this apparent effectiveness, station staff identified funding and logistical capacity, rather than audience demand, as the binding constraint on scaling the model to additional regions or languages.

Discussion

These findings support Habermas's (1989) claim that an authentic public sphere requires spaces insulated from purely commercial or state control, while extending it to a broadcast context in which citizen speech is foregrounded rather than mediated primarily through journalistic framing. They also illustrate Freire's (1970) dialogical model in practice: complainants are positioned as narrators of their own circumstances rather than as passive subjects of institutional reporting. Yet the dominance of individualized over structural framing (Table 2) tempers this reading. Amin's (1976) structural critique warns that treating development problems as discrete personal grievances, however sympathetically covered, can leave the socio-economic conditions producing those grievances unexamined; Bereketete's format resolves individual cases more often than it interrogates the systems generating them. The reliance on a single, resource-constrained platform to perform functions ordinarily associated with formal accountability institutions — as Campbell (2018) and Oso (2011) both suggest — further raises questions about the sustainability and equity of a model in which access to redress depends on proximity to one studio and one broadcaster's discretion.

Recommendations

First, capacity-building programs should be developed to help other community broadcasters adapt Bereketete's participatory format, improving the representation of marginalized voices across the sector. Second, government and media policy should extend structural support to independent platforms serving marginalized communities, including funding windows tied to demonstrated developmental benchmarks.

Third, partnerships with NGOs and development agencies could supply the funding and logistical resources needed to extend Bereketete's reach to underserved regions and languages. Finally, future research should pair the qualitative case-study approach used here with the full quantitative coding dataset to test, rather than illustrate, the associations between broadcast exposure and civic outcomes.

Conclusion

Bereketete Radio/TV demonstrates that grassroots broadcast media can operationalize participatory and public-sphere principles in ways that materially affect marginalized communities' access to voice and redress, even where formal state accountability mechanisms are weak. Its limitations — dependence on funding, logistical capacity, and the discretion of a single platform — indicate that such models complement rather than substitute for stronger institutional accountability. Replicating Bereketete's core practices across other Nigerian and African community media platforms could meaningfully broaden inclusive development communication, provided the resource constraints identified here are addressed.

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