

MEDIA POLICY BRIEFINGS

No. 4

NIGERIA'S BROADCASTING POLICY REFORM EFFORTS



**N I G E R I A
COMMUNITY RADIO
C O A L I T I O N**



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Your quarterly companion, MEDIA POLICY BRIEFINGS, is here again. It has brought you information and education on a key issue of this period: policy reform efforts of the government.

Presented in the usual lucid style, this edition is also rich and delivers crucial information on the broadcasting sector.

It is an important material to be read by decision-makers and other citizens who want an improved positioning of broadcasting so it can positively engage and move development forward in Nigeria.

Please enjoy and use it to advocate and build capacity.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

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Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1999 with a baggage of issues in broadcasting. A number of government policy decisions and their implementation appeared to have improved the broadcasting landscape. The liberalization of the sector which started in 1992 and the subsequent licencing of private commercial broadcasting stations were part of this forward movement.

But several issues were still unresolved or unattended. For example licencing still remained a rigorous process, particularly because the regulatory body did not have full licencing power. The implementation of private involvement in broadcasting ownership appeared to stop half-way, because community broadcasters were not licenced.

Civil society advocacy for reform moved to a higher gear as soon as the new civilian office holders took office in 1999. Part of this advocacy has been championed by the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition, a grouping of Nigerians demanding the introduction of community broadcasting in the country's grassroots.

Government's responses in the form of reform efforts have now spanned several years.



In mid-2004, the Federal Government of Nigeria began a policy reform process. It instituted a 24-member Committee to review the 1990 National Mass Communication Policy document.

The 1990 policy document acknowledged the provision of Section 36 of the 1979 constitution which opened the door to private participation in broadcasting. But the policy document closed this door by saying the time was not ripe for private ownership of the broadcast media.

The government committee worked for about six months and submitted its report in November 2004.

Key among its recommendations on broadcasting were that.

- ❖ There should be an equitable spread of broadcasting licence categories to ensure that no community or segment of the population is denied access to information through the electronic media.
- ❖ The development of community broadcasting should be promoted.
- ❖ Adherence to professionalism should be achieved through self-regulation and statutory regulation
- ❖ The regulatory body should be a convergent one, that is combining broadcasting and telecommunications.
- ❖ The body should be an independent, non-partisan, non-sectional agency, with well-defined sources of funding.
- ❖ All radio and television stations shall allocate at least 20 per cent of their programmes to rural activities while community-based media shall allocate 80 per cent to their immediate localities.
- ❖ Public service stations should be prohibited from commercial broadcasting. They should derive their funding from such sources as radio / television set licence fees, grants and other industry charges. Private stations should derive funding from commercial activities. It did not specify the funding sources for community broadcasting stations.

A public document is still to emerge from the government on this exercise.



The government moved a step further in August 2006 when it set up a 17-member Working Group to design a National Community Radio Policy document.

In its report submitted in December 2006, the Working Group made recommendations which include the following:

1. **Access, Participation and Ownership:** Community groups and individuals should be involved in financial/other contributions and represented in the control, management and operations of community radio stations.
2. **Licencing:** The broadcasting licence should be free, without prejudice to reasonable processing fees; application and processing should be simple, transparent and community-friendly.
3. **Programming, Content and Language:** Broadcasting will be in language (s) of the community served as much as possible will reflect the socio-linguistic realities of its environment; content planning and production will be participatory, involving representatives of the audience.
4. **Governance and Management:** Of the community radio should be community-driven, accountable, transparent and responsive, based on efficient practices and appropriate tools; prior to establishment, the participatory methodology should be deployed in creating awareness and sensitizing the people on community radio.
5. **Technical Arrangement:** The regulator should prepare a frequency plan which ensure sufficient frequencies for community radio throughout the country 10 to 15 percent of FM broadcast frequency spectrum for community radio stations; stations should be granted transmission power of 100 watts, although higher levels where justified.
6. **Sustainability and funding:** Community radio licences should be registered as not-for-profit entities with at least 60 percent local ownership; there should be regulatory restrictions on source of revenue other than to encourage sustainability through diversity of financing and to avoid dependence on any one source, they shall raise fund through advertising, sponsorship and other diverse sources, although no single source should account for more than 50 percent.
7. **Research and Capacity-Building:** The regular and other stakeholders shall encourage and promote research and training into the sustainability, social and development impact of community radio.
8. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Both the regulatory body and community members should be involved in monitoring and evaluating activities.



In pursuance of its development objectives, the new government which took office in May 2007 articulated a vision 20-2020. This is a programme design to take Nigeria into the league of the world's 20 strongest economies by the year 2020.

The government inaugurated national technical working groups (NTWGs) on various sectors in April 2009. Each NTWG had a brief to design a policy framework on its sector for the attainment of Vision 20-2020. Among these NTWGs was a 23-member media and communications thematic group.

In its report submitted to the government in July 2009, the group recommended, among others, the following on the broadcasting sector:

- Extending the reach of broadcast media to communities in Nigeria.
- Establishing community media particularly community radio, newspapers, community theatres and viewing centres in all communities in Nigeria.
- Increasing media consumption habit among Nigerians
- Instituting comprehensive policy and legal reforms
- Enacting relevant legal reforms and legislations to fully operationalize statutory functions of such regulatory bodies as National Broadcasting Commission.
- Promoting and providing training and retraining of media personnel and students.
- Providing state-of-the-art equipment in media establishments across the country.
- Promoting through the media open and accountable leadership at all levels.



Another policy process began to take step again in January 2010. A stakeholder's forum took place in Abuja, the capital, to kick-start the making of a National Broadcasting Policy. It was held under the auspices of the regulatory body, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC).

Top officials of the NBC who spoke at the occasion provided the rationale for the policy process: the socio-political, economic and technical changes which had occurred since deregulation of broadcasting in 1992; the important role broadcasting would be expected to play in the implementation of government desire to place Nigeria among the 20 strongest economies of the world by the year 2020.

Stakeholders submitted inputs into the policy process at the Abuja forum. Among their recommendations were the following:

- The policy should recognize a three sub-sector structure in broadcasting, comprising the public, commercial and community sub-sectors.
- The broadcasting regulatory body should be independent and have full regulatory powers, including power to approve licences.
- The importation of broadcasting equipment should enjoy tax waivers to reduce financial burden on broadcast owners.
- Government broadcasting organizations at federal and state levels should be transformed into public broadcasters.
- Local content quota on broadcasting channels should be set by the regulatory (with industry consultation) and enforced.
- To guarantee an enabling environment for broadcasting, there should be legal reform incorporating repeals, amendments and enactment of new ones.
- The broadcasting industry should be taken out of the civil service structure.
- The provisions of the National Universities Commission (NUC) Act and the National Broadcasting commission (NBC) Act should be aligned to clarify which body is vested with the power to accredit broadcasting courses in tertiary institutions.

According to the organizers, the process of building this policy instrument would pass through some other stages: a retreat at which selected experts would distil and string together the recommendations of stakeholders who participated in the forum; a display of the product of the retreat in public domain, so that members of the public could make further inputs; and processing of the document to the federal government for action.



The government of Nigeria has responded to civil society's demands by setting up policy reform processes in the broadcasting sector.

Somehow, none of these policy processes has been taken to conclusion. The attention on them has been very slow.

It is, however, encouraging that a renewed government commitment to the processes is taking shape. In November 2009, the Federal Ministry of Information and Communication, in collaboration with UNICEF, organized a meeting in Jos, Plateau state, which brought stakeholders together to study and update the reviewed National Mass Communication Policy and National Community Radio Policy documents. The government said the exercise was a prelude to taking the policy processes to a logical conclusion.

While the public waits for the outcomes of those processes, the government and citizens of Nigeria must not forget that policy deficits translate into democratic deficits. Up-to-date policies which are in consonance with international best practices and which serve the public good must be in place if our democracy must grow.







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