

Digitisation challenge

No doubt, expectations are high as the 2012 deadline set in Nigeria for transformation from analogue to digital terrestrial broadcasting draws closer. This predicated upon the fact that the global community is racing towards the 2015/2020 deadline given to countries by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU).

While advanced societies like the United States of America, Germany and other European countries have been able to carry out the switchover successfully, some African countries like Morocco, Kenya, and South Africa have gone far in the race with the latter promising to transmit the 2010 World Cup matches on the digital platform.

But to observers, the process has been slow in Nigeria. And there is much apprehension. For instance, participants at the General Assembly of the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON), held in Lokoja, Kogi State recently, believed that Nigeria may not meet the deadline unless a lot of hardwork, commitment and sufficient funds are invested in it. As a matter of fact, the Governor of Kogi State, Alhaji Ibrahim Idris also called for the extension of the deadline.

President Yar'Adua-led government had approved the June 17, 2012 deadline and set up a Presidential Advisory Committee (PAC) on the Transition from Analogue to Digital Broadcasting in Nigeria, which was made up of highly skilled and knowledgeable individuals drawn from different fields.

The committee headed by Engineer Isaac Wakombo, a seasoned broadcaster was inaugurated on October 13, 2008 and it submitted its report on June 29, 2009. The atmosphere at the Abuja venue of the presenta-



•Akunyili

tion of the report was electrifying while all the stakeholders were in joyous mood. The report, to many, was a job well done and members of the committee were praised for their consistency and outstanding efforts. The Director General of National Broadcasting Commission, Engineer Yomi Bolarinwa who described digitalisation as "the next global broadcast frontier," believed that it had a greater advantage over analogue.

The NBC boss also noted that the event was "a giant leap" in the history of broadcasting in Nigeria.

He therefore praised the committee members whom he described as "patriots who worked selflessly to propose what they believed to be the best for the future of broadcasting in their fatherland."

Receiving the report on behalf of the government, the Minister of Information and Communications, Prof. Dora Akunyili, assured that the Federal Government would meet the 2012 deadline, and restated that the government would do its best to ensure that the dream became a reality.

Akunyili stressed that all national and

state television broadcasting stations in the country must, in the next three years transit from analogue to digital line to conform to the provisions of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) towards the enhancement of a better and optimal performance in the broadcast industry.

Commenting on the report, Akunyili pointed out that the document would help chart a new policy direction and regulatory framework for the broadcast sector in Nigeria.

In his comment, the Chairman of the committee, Mr. Isaac Wakombo, urged the government to give its full support to the project, as transition from analogue to digital broadcast requires the support of the government, especially in the area of funding.

The committee in its recommendations advocated a new broadcast model that separates the function of the broadcast content providers, and the broadcasting signal distributors; ownership structure of the broadcasting signal distributor that takes into consideration factors such as requirements for quick realization of the project, financial capacity, national security and the issue of efficiency the restructuring of broadcast licensing regime in the country. It also recommended the re-establishment of the public broadcasters as a social institution in a commercialised environment; management of the spectrum; suitable infrastructural digital broadcasting standards that would ensure compatibility on both the national and international spheres; accessible programme regime to members of the public; respect in environmental issues; development of the content industries and so on.

However, since the report was submitted activities towards the actualisation of this deadline in Nigeria have been rather slow. There is therefore the call on the government to translate its words into action, so that Nigeria can be quickly launched into the digital era.

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President Yar'Adua approves licensing of private radio and television network

President Musa Yar'Adua has given approval for the licensing of commercially operated and privately owned radio and television network services, which would operate alongside existing Federal Government-owned radio and television networks.

The announcement was made by the Director General of the National Broadcasting Commission, Engineer Yomi Bolarinwa in Abuja on September 3, 2009.

According to NBC, "After 77 years of radio broadcasting, 50 years of Television broadcasting and 17 years of broadcast deregulation in Nigeria, only the Federal Government owns the only licensed radio and television networks; namely the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) and the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA).

"Given Nigeria's enormous size, her wide diversity and remarkable plurality, as well as

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President Yar'Adua approves licensing of private radio and television network

its economic prospects, the National Broadcasting Commission has determined that it is feasible, desirable and indeed imperative to increase the number of broadcasting networks in the country."

As learnt, the move was within the framework of the Federal Government's economic reform programme aimed at modernising the Nigerian economy and expanding the role of the private sector in driving sustained economic development.

The commission boss unveiled the timetable and announced that the licensing new network services would be through a bid process and urged prospective bidders to cooperate with the commission for the success of the exercise.

National Assembly committed to FoI bill passage - Reps member

A member of the House of Representatives from Ikorodu Federal Constituency, Mrs. Abike Dabiri-Erewa, has rekindled the hope of stakeholders in the media sector that debate on the suspended FoI bill would resume soon.

The lawmaker, who is the Chairman of the House Committee on Diaspora, disclosed that more members of the House were now more sensitised on the importance of the bill in the polity.

Mrs. Abike Dabiri-Erewa, who is also one of the sponsors of the bill said that the awareness on the bill has opened the eyes of more members of the National Assembly on the need for such bill at this time to improve governance in the country.

She said that more members of the National Assembly were committed to passing the bill, and pointed out that "the bill was not about the media, but an effort at deepening democracy in the country... We will keep trying to make sure that our colleagues are convinced. I am telling them that the House will make history by passing it"

The delay by the National Assembly in passing the Freedom of Information (FOI) bill has continued to generate reactions from stakeholders. Non-governmental bodies, media professionals and other concerned individuals have called on the holders of state power to stop using delay tactics to thwart the efforts of those crusading for the passage of the bill.

The Executive Director of Media Rights Agenda, Mr. Edetean Ojo, implored stakeholders to beam searchlight on the lack of interest in the bill by members of House and the continued delay in the passage of the bill to find out the actual reasons why members of the House are not predisposed towards its passage. Some civil society groups have vowed to remain tireless in the efforts to ensure that the bill received the approval of the lawmakers.

Akunyili seeks media support to re-brand Nigeria

The Hon. Minister of Information and Communications, Prof Dora Akunyili has called the support of stakeholders in the media sector in the current attempt by the Federal Government to re-brand the image of the country.

The minister who was represented by Director -General, National Film and Video Censors Board, Mr. Emeka Mba at the 1st 2009 National Programme - Planning Conference of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), held in Owerri, Imo State, recently stated that government's efforts to shore up the image of the country could only be realised if the media cooperate with the government.

Akunyili stated the resolve of the government to use the re-branding exercise to steer the ship of the country to a

safe harbour.

She called for more understanding among Nigerians and urged the media to be more socially responsible and report issues objectively.

"The media should be more socially responsible and engage in developmental journalism through socially responsible reporting.

The media should give prominence and celebrate inspirational stories as much as it does the negative news items. The idea that it is only bad news that sells is outdated," she said.

The information minister said that Nigerians were concerned about the poor image of the country in the global sphere and she therefore implored the media to, as a matter of urgency, correct the negative impression that people hold about the country.

•Participants at the training in the use of oral testimonies on radio organised by Institute for Media and Society and Panos Institute West Africa in Makurdi recently



Reps to engage executive over community radio licensing

As the efforts to get the Federal Government to license community radios in Nigeria continue, the House of Representatives has promised to liaise with the members of the executive arm to speed up the process.

The Chairman of the House Committee on Information and National Orientation, Hon. Dino Melaye said this during a courtesy visit by a delegation from the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition (CRC).

He expressed displeasure over the situation where the country, despite its huge size and contributions in the area of mass communication, could not boast of a single community radio station. Recognizing the importance of community radio in the process of governance, Melaye said the House of Representatives was prepared to work with other stakeholders to ensure that the broadcast policy, legislative and regulatory framework in the country

became conducive and favourable to community broadcasting.

The activities already mapped out by the committee, according to him, include a roundtable dialogue with the Minister of Information, the Director General of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and Nigeria Community Radio Coalition (CRC). The plan is to generate common position and sent to the presidency for implementation. Speaking at the event, the leader of the CRC delegation, Professor Alfred Opubor, Executive Director, Africa News Media and Development Centre, Benin Republic, highlighted the important role that community radio plays in national development and peacebuilding.

According to him, it serves, among other things, as a tool for eradicating poverty, promoting women participation in the development process, and helping to prevent maternal morbidity and child mortality.

INTERNATIONAL

India Education Society gets community radio license

Manav Rachna Education Society in Faridabad, India has been granted permission to establish, maintain and operate a community radio station by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Based on the agreement, the community radio station is expected to be operational within three months.

As learnt, the programmes broadcast

from the community radio station will provide useful information to the community for their development as well as panel discussions, weather forecasts, entertainment, tips on health including information regarding free health meals organized by Manav Rachna Educational Institutions, free and subsidised OPD facilities in dental care and physiotherapy. It will also promote social causes including prevention and eradication of AIDS, Thalassaemia, Dengue, Chickenguenia, Hemophilia and drug abuse.

The ministry, which encouraged the setting up of the Community Radio Station believed that it would provide an opportunity to the local communities to express themselves, share their views and particularly empower the women, youth and the marginalized groups to take part in local self governance and overall socio-economic and cultural development of the area.

It will also better inform the society about the developmental initiatives of government and promote transparency in the implementation of the scheme.



The establishment of community broadcasting in several communities in Nigeria may produce a well informed people, capable of using power and energy efficiently in line with government vision of industrialization by the year 2015.

Community broadcasting with its attendant grass-root advantage stands a better chance of enlightening the people on the dangers of vandalising power and energy infrastructure. The rate of pipeline vandalism that robs on the national economy, not to talk of the danger it poses to the lives of our youth could best be tackled via community media.

Community broadcasting has the capacity to enhance the various reform programmes of the federal administration, especially in the area of agriculture and the development of co-operative societies

—NBC at the policy dialogue on media pluralism in Nigeria held in Abuja

If a member or anyone tells you we are not ripe for FoI bill, then we are not also ripe for democracy as the bill is for the sustainability of our nascent democracy, transparency and accountability and good governance in the polity.

—Abike Dabiri-Erewa, Chairman, House Committee on Diaspora during a media chat recently.

The media must stand up to its objective of public enlightenment, de-emphasise politics and emphasise better proactive regulation. The nature of the Nigerian society; poor literacy rate, and high level of cynicism, preference for rumour and police brutality poses challenge to professionalism in the media industry in the country

Tonnie Iredia, Former Director General, Nigeria Television Authority at the public forum organised by National Broadcasting Commission in Akure, Ondo State.

From my distance, I have admired journalism because it is the only profession that has a constitution for its role... the FoI Act is not meant for journalists. Promoting that bill as tool for journalism, rather than as a major package for openness, transparency, good governance and the guarantee for democracy has been its greatest Achilles heel.

Chima Ibeneche, Managing Director, Nigeria LNG Limited at the training for journalists in Rivers State on July 13, 2009.

Thailand rolls out community radio law

Community radio stations in Thailand have come under a regulation for its operation.

Prime Minister's Office Minister, Sathit Wongnongtoey said recently that all the community radio stations operating in the country are expected to abide by the law.

Mr Sathit stated that with the announcement of the regulation, community radios in the country were going to be made to comply with the law. All the community radio stations which have registered with the

National Telecommunications Commission were required to meet the criteria set down in the regulation, while those yet to register with the NTC were required to do so by the deadline announced by the minister.

He pointed out that community radio would be truly used for the purpose for which it is expected to serve, which is to serve the public, and stressed that community radio stations should not be used as a tool to advance the political ambition of any group or individual.

CNBC Africa wins award on business reporting

Doing business in Africa, a CNBC Africa programme won the best Television feature 2009 award at the Africa Business reporting awards.

The presenter/producer of the programme, Sue Benkes, Cameraman Thabo Mathebula and Editor, Amanda Diergaard who won the award stood tall at the gala ceremony held in London on Thursday, July 2, 2009.

The panel of judges commended the high quality of the reporting saying "This is high-quality reporting. It is extremely well filmed to the highest technical standards and the producers have done their homework ensuring

excellent access to top level interviewees. This is a comprehensive lively and thoughtful piece, which leaves the viewer wanting to see more."

According to the Chief Executive officer of Diageo and chair of the panel, the prevailing economic climate in Africa warranted new ways of reporting African business. Doing Business in Africa delivers on what "CNBC Africa is doing every minute of everyday in Africa and that is changing perception and mindsets about the economic and business possibilities on this incredible continent" Gary Alfonso, Chief Operating Officer of CNBC Africa said.

'FoI bill passage will boost anti-corruption crusade'

The Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Farida Waziri has thrown her weight behind the Freedom of Information bill at present before the National Assembly.

EFCC, an anti-corruption agency has seen the media as a potent tool in the efforts to sanitise the society.

The EFCC boss who spoke while presenting a paper at the forum organised for retired and serving permanent secretaries in Abuja said that the timely passage of the FoI bill would greatly help in the war against corrupt practices in the society.

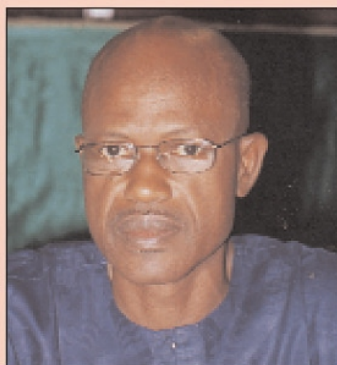
According to her, there ought to be a conscientious system for the gathering and dissemination of information without any hindrance as this would be of immense benefit to the development of the society.

"The press must castigate the villains and praise the heroes. It is through such activities that people will appreciate that it pays to have integrity.

"To this extent, a freedom of information legislation, coupled with investigative reporting, could be helpful. These will also engender a culture of freedom of speech, which is a constitutional guarantee but in practice, hardly utilised. The freedom of information bill could tremendously help the process," the EFCC boss said.

How community radio can be sustained in Nigeria – *Alymana Bathily*

**Alymana Bathily,
Coordinator of the
African Region of the
World Association of
Community Radio
Broadcasters (AMARC)
speaks to Media Vista**



•Bathily

A MARC has been involved in CR advocacy in Nigeria for many years now, what are your impressions about the advocacy strategies?

It should be more aggressive and open to more interest groups.

How would you assess the responses of government agencies, to the advocacy so far?

Government has not been very responsive.

From your experience, what are the key differences between community radio development in Nigeria and other countries, particularly in Africa?

The government is less open to Community Radio. Pressure on government is less strong in Nigeria.

The call for community radio licensing

in Nigeria is becoming more strident in Nigeria. What do you think informed this?

It is basically because of the fact that sensitisation might have reached a larger public.

What is the likely impact that would be experienced in Nigeria if the government begins to license community radio stations?

Private interests may try and camouflage as Community Radio.

What are the reforms that you would suggest on the broadcasting laws and policies in Nigeria?

Regulation should be strengthened to

ensure that the ownership of radios is controlled by identifiable communities and that content remains in line with community interests. Financial viability of community radio should also be addressed by allowing access to part of the publicity market and allowing for government subsidy.

The Presidential Advisory Committee on broadcasting digitization recently submitted its report. What impact is digitalization likely to have on CR broadcasting in Nigeria?

Like elsewhere, digitalization will allow for the convergence of radio and the Internet, improve the quality of the technologies and lower their costs. It will require the training and retraining of staff. If the process is not planned over a long period of time, acquisition of equipment and training of staff could be unsustainable.

The government of Nigeria plans to license one big radio and big TV commercial networks before the year end. What do you think this portends for the development of Community Radio in Nigeria?

The fact that no mention was made of the licensing of community radio could mean that it is not on the government radar for now.

Bon calls for improved funding of broadcasting stations

State governments in the country have been called upon to give priority to the funding of the broadcasting outfits in their respective states so that the broadcasting organisations would be able to perform their social responsibility roles. This was contained in the memorandum sent by the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON) to the National Council on Information meeting held in Makurdi recently.

BON, a voluntary umbrella association of over 250 public and private radio and television stations in the country said it was necessary to appraise the activities of the broadcast sector with the sole aim of moving the industry forward.

It decried the large turnover of Chief Executive Officers in state-owned radio and television stations, which it believed had adversely affected the growth of the stations, and called on the government to de-emphasise the politicisation of the appointment of the CEOs.

It commended the efforts being made to transit from analogue to digital broadcasting in the country, and urged the government to

fast-track the process and provide the necessary support to upgrade the equipment to be

able to meet the 2012 deadline set by the International Telecommunications Union.

Use broadcast stations to build peace - Iredia

Broadcasting organisations in the country have been implored to use their stations to build peace in the society.

The former Director General of Nigerian Television Authority, Dr Tonnie Iredia, who said this in Akure where broadcasters from Benin Zone, coverin Edo, Delta, Ekiti and Ondo States converged recently, stated that the media wield a huge influence on the society and could therefore be used either to foment trouble or for the peaceful coexistence of the society.

In particular, he urged broadcast stations to exercise a lot of caution in reporting political happenings in the country due to the volatile nature of the society.

"The media must stand up to its objective of public enlightenment, de-emphasise politics and institute better proactive regulation. The nature of the Nigerian Society, poor literacy rate, and high level of cynicism, pref-

erence for rumour and police brutality pose challenge to professionalism in the media industry in the country," he said.

According to him, Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria saddles the media with the responsibility of holding government accountable to the people, but did not provide it with the authority required to carry this function out effectively. He therefore regretted that almost a decade after the Freedom of Information Bill was sent to the National Assembly, it had not yet been passed into law, and stated that no country can move forward without a free press.

The Director General of the National Broadcasting Commission, Engineer Yomi Bolarinwa, also urged the broadcast stations to invest more in research and to also stick to the ethics of the profession in the interest of the society.

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Secretariat: Institute for Media and Society

3, Emina Crescent, off Toyin Street, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria, West Africa.

Tel: +234 1 8102261, +234 803 307 9828

E-mail: info@nigeriacommunityradio.org

imesoimeso@hotmail.com

www.nigeriacommunityradio.org

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Ayodele Ale

Jide Fajoyomi

Damilare Alao

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