



Rooting for
**COMMUNITY
RADIO**
in Nigeria

Edited by Akin Akingbulu



First Published in 2008 by



Institute for Media and Society

3, Emina Crescent, Off Toyin Street, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria.

Phone/Fax: 234 -1-7730308 E-mail: imeso@hyperia.com, info@cemeso.org

Website: <http://www.cemeso.org>

And



Panos Institute West Africa

6 rue Chalmette, BP 21 132 Dakar Ponty Senegal

Phone: +221 849 1666 Fax: + 221 822 1761

E-mail: panos@panos-ao.org Website: <http://www.panos-ao.org>

Reprinted in 2010

©Institute for Media and Society and Panos Institute West Africa

All rights reserved, No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical photocopying, or recording or otherwise, or stored in any retrieval system of any nature, without the written permission of the copyright holders and publishers.

ISBN: 978-37210-9-7

printers: grafix & images

tel: +234-1-826020, 0806 097 0227 e: grafx.images@yahoo.com

F OREWORD

The advocacy for the actualization of a community radio sector in Nigeria is five years old, and still occupying the front burner in the agenda for development in this country. During the planning and launching stages of the 'Initiative on Building Community Radio in Nigeria' In 2003, stakeholders were unsure of the exact length of the journey, but certain that the challenge would be overcome and community radio would become a reality in our country before long.

Stakeholders have kept faith. In every part of Nigeria and beyond her shores, they have continued to spread the message of grassroots development which has radio as a key ingredient. On the background of a thorough understanding of the Nigerian environment, they have resiliently engaged governance processes in policy, legislation and regulation. And the outcomes have been generally encouraging.

Gathered in the following pages are carefully articulated materials, which have been generated by stakeholders to press advocacy in the past few years. Significantly, the voices in the collection straddle such constituencies as civil society, media, academia, government and the international community.

It is our hope that this publication will further provide public education and help in bringing about a vibrant community radio sector before long in Nigeria.

Institute for Media and Society & Panos Institute West Africa.

A CKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to thank all the writers whose materials have made this publication possible.

We also wish to express appreciation to Nigerian media organizations for their continuing positive engagement of the community radio development process in this country.

We particularly wish to thank The Daily Trust, The Guardian, The Punch, The Daily Independent, The Sun, Newswatch and others on whose pages some of the materials in this publication have earlier been published.

C ontent

Foreword	
Acknowledgment	iv
1. For A Workable Community Radio Policy <i>-Frank Nweke Jnr</i>	7
2. Building Community Radio in Nigeria: How Far? <i>-Akin Akingbulu & Miriam Menkiti</i>	9
3. Broadcast Pluralism: The Monopoly of the Airwaves by Government-owned Stations <i>Ralph Akinfeleye</i>	12
4. Steps to Development-Oriented Radio Broadcasting in Nigeria <i>-Ayo Ojebode & Tunde Adegbola</i>	14
5. One Nation Many Voices <i>Sola Balogun</i>	18
6. Another Abandoned Project? <i>-Kazeem Akintunde</i>	21
7. The Radio Revolution in Mali <i>-Is'haq Modibbo Kawu</i>	23
8. Where is the National Policy on Frequency Management? <i>-Y.Z. Yau</i>	27
9. Building Peace with Radio: Lessons from Liberia <i>-Frank Sainworla</i>	39
10. How Community Radio Aid Development <i>Ayodele Ale</i>	45

11. In Liberia, Community Radio Rules the Airwaves <i>-Kabir Alabi Garba</i>	38
12. Nigeria Overdue for Community Radio <i>Umaru A. Pate</i>	42
13. Community Radio As A Tool for Empowerment of Citizens in Nigeria <i>-Akin Akingbulu</i>	64
14. Appropriating Media Interactivity For A Transition From Representative To participatory Democracy In Nigeria <i>-Tunde Adegbola</i>	70

1

FOR A WORKABLE COMMUNITY RADIO POLICY

By Frank Nweke Jnr.

The beauty and centrality of community radio to development cannot be overstated and several studies have given credence to this assertion. This, perhaps, explains why advocates of sustainable human development believe that radio, particularly community radio, holds the greatest potential for measurable and participatory development. Indeed, the nature of community radio confers on it an uncommon capacity for effective transfer of information on social change programmes from government and other social institutions to the mass of the people especially in the developing economies. This scenario thus underscores the organic interface between the phenomenon of community radio and the vision of the current administration as articulated in the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy whose thrust is the opening of the nation's political economy to increased participation by the citizenry

Importantly, the reigning paradigm of development is one which places emphasis and priority on the right of citizens to receive and exchange information, the exercise of which is pivoted on an independent broadcasting system, which ensures that everyone is able to participate freely in the structure of state and civil society.

I therefore wish to inform you that the Federal Government (through the Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation) has commenced the process of creating an enabling regime for the introduction of community radio in Nigeria. The resolution of the National Council on Information held in 2005 and the working paper on community radio developed by the National Broadcasting Commission are clear indications of government's commitment to develop an appropriate framework for the emergence of community radio in Nigeria.

The review process of the National Mass Communication Policy, the update of the reviewed NBC Act as well as other ancillary legislations which are

likely to circumscribe the operation of community radio in Nigeria are being fast-tracked by the appropriate organ of the ministry.

Therefore, the delay in the take-off of community radio in Nigeria is necessitated by the desire to ensure that appropriate legal, regulatory and administrative frameworks crucial to the success of community radio are put in place. However, I will soon meet you and other stakeholders of the community radio initiative in Nigeria to design the consultation process and to set up a committee to draft a workable community radio policy taking into consideration the peculiar complexities of the Nigeria society.

(Excerpts from a keynote address delivered at an African regional round table on community radio development, in Abuja, Nigeria, on July 5, 2009

**Frank Nweke Jnr. Was formally Minister of information of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.*

2

BUILDING COMMUNITY RADIO IN NIGERIA: HOW FAR?

By Akin Akingbulu & Miriam Menkiti

BACKGROUND

The efforts to put community radio as a sector of the vibrant media landscape in Nigeria are already in the fifth year, thanks to the vast and growing community of stakeholders whose vision and resilience continue to propel the advocacy and accommodation for this globally acclaimed voice of the grassroots.

We recall that in the fourth quarter of 2003, a historic journey which aimed to actualize a pro-poor, pluralist broadcasting environment and the development of community radio started in our country. Two international organizations, the Panos Institute West Africa (PIWA) and the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), in partnership with the Institute for Media and Society (IMS-Nigeria), launched an "Initiative on Building Community Radio in Nigeria".

The establishment of a steering committee which articulated an Action Plan for the initiative effectively put Nigerians on the driving seat of the advocacy.

Implementation began in earnest. A series of awareness-raising and interest-generating workshops took the message of community radio development to the various regions of Nigeria. Gathering in these meetings were such important stakeholder constituencies as grassroots communities, civil society organizations, the media, academia, other professional groups, government agencies, international development groups, among others.

The meetings generated more strategies for advocacy and placed demands for policy, legislative and regulatory reform on the tables of appropriate government agencies.

As the advocacy continued, the initiative contributed significant inputs into

emerging policy reform processes and engaged specific constituencies such as policy makers, regulators, international development agencies, the media and rural communities. Among the activities in this interaction were in-country roundtables and study visits to community radio stations in other West African countries.

Meanwhile, our initiative partners, Panos and AMARC, projected and expanded the advocacy efforts at the international level.

TRANSFORMATION IN THE LANDSCAPE

The CR advocacy has achieved worthwhile results. Among these are:

- (i) The participation base of advocates has tremendously expanded. From an 11-member steering committee at take-off in 2003, there are today about 200 organizations and individuals within the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition, the umbrella body which was formed by stakeholders in 2005. The membership is drawn from a broad spectrum of constituencies with a common bond of social and grassroots development. Members are located in all the geographical zones of the country.
- (ii) A strong awareness of the benefits of community radio has permeated numerous communities. This has led to an upsurge in the interest and resolve to own/establish community radio and to demand for licences and frequencies.
- (iii) Several international development agencies have not only appreciated but also expressed commitment to the advocacy as well as establishment initiatives in some communities.
- (iv) The broadcasting regulatory agency, the National Broadcasting Commission, has reviewed its industry regulatory instrument, the Nigerian Broadcasting Code, to provide wider accommodation for the licencing of community radio.
- (v) The federal government has instituted three policy processes. In mid-2004, it established a Working group to review the moribund National Mass Communication Policy (of 1990), while in 2006, it also

set up Working Groups to design a National Community Radio Policy and a National Frequency Spectrum Management Policy. The reports of these working groups are in its custody.

- (vi) Members of parliament at national and state (second tier of government) levels have expressed support for community radio and willingness to facilitate legal reform in its favour.
- (vii) Community radio issues have moved up to top priority on the agenda of media development in Nigeria. For example, CR now receives prime consideration on the programmes of media conferences in Nigeria.


CHALLENGES


There are still several important hurdles for the advocacy to cross:

Different levels of understanding and commitment to CR issues exist within government agencies. For example, regulation is ahead of the policy and legislative levels.

There has been a high turnover in government agencies. Frequent replacement of government officials in key policy-making positions has, for instance, found expression in the appointment of five Information Ministers since the returns of civil rule in 1999, and three since the launch of the CR advocacy in November 2003.

Government machinery has been slow. The final documents from the three policy processes which were initiated in 2004 and 2006 have not been released to the public.

 Inconsistency is also evident. Government said in mid-2006 that it wanted a policy in place before licencing CR stations. But while it has not released the CR policy, it approved licences for stations in educational institutions. The understanding with stakeholders was for grassroots CR, but no approval has yet been given for any in this category.

 Government's interest level in policy has not been replicated in legal reform. It introduced a bill to review the National Broadcasting

Commission Act (the broadcasting law) in parliament in 2001. The bill was not passed into law before the tenure of that parliament ended in 2003. But government has not re-introduced it in parliament.

GOVERNANCE & DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

Nigeria has enormous governance and development challenges to tackle and overcome. This is demonstrated by basic social data in a few key sectors. In the health sector, maternal mortality stands at 800 per 100,000 live births; infant mortality rate is 100 per 1000 live births; prevalence of HIV/AIDS stands at 3.8 per cent, and life expectancy for the average citizen is 43 years. In education: although the country's 1999 constitution provides that the government "shall strive to eradicate illiteracy", general literacy rate still stands at 67 per cent. Over 65 per cent of the country's 140 million people live below the poverty line. Nigeria was ranked 158th out of 177 countries in the 2007 annual Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme, UNDP.

Providing sustenance for this pathetic situation is a governance profile, particularly at the local levels, characterized by resource mismanagement along with lack of transparency and accountability.

Governments have implemented various strategies to address these national challenges. But consistently lacking in these strategies is the appropriate positioning of the people and their communication needs at the centre.

Good governance and genuine development require the integration of all sections of society through appropriate communication and interaction processes. The grassroots are particularly central in all these because they constitute the starting point of development. Unfortunately, they have remained marginalized and voiceless.

Painfully, existing media, including those in the broadcasting sector, have been unable to provide adequate coverage and engagement for grassroots governance and development.

The emergence of community radio in Nigeria will help to address the above-mentioned and other national challenges in various ways, including:

fostering true broadcasting pluralism; providing access and voice for marginalized or underserved peoples and communities; empowering the grassroots, to participate in search for solutions to issues affecting them and the country at large; building the capacities of communities to hold political office holders transparent and accountable, and helping to preserve languages and cultures across the country.

(This is an abridged version of a paper prepared for an international community radio conference in Accra, Ghana in August 2008.)

**Akingbulu is the Executive Director of the Institute for Media and Society, Lagos, Nigeria. Menkiti is the Coordinator of the Women Information Network, Enugu, Nigeria.*

3

BROADCAST PLURALISM: THE MONOPOLY OF THE AIRWAVES BY THE GOVERNMENT-OWNED STATIONS

By Ralph A. Akin

BACKGROUND

In a democracy, it is assumed that broadcast media shall give equal opportunities and facilities, the presentation and articulation of divergent views, including dissenting opinions and positions.

Also in a democracy whether nascent and not, it is assumed that the people have "the right to know". The right to know what? All the major activities, decisions, policies and pronouncements on the citizens' welfare, development, survival, security and protection.

But in Nigeria, only what the government feels should be disclosed to the people are made known to them. Other important information (which the people have the right to know) are often withheld under such camouflage as the Official Secrets Act; national security and constitutional regulations of the airwaves.

The deregulation of the airwaves of 1992 was established to regulate government monopoly of the airwaves. The idea was to allow public and private broadcast media co-exist without "collusion" with one another. But instead of reduction of increase government-owned radio and television stations, the country has witnessed over three hundred percent (300%) increase in the establishment and empowerment of government-owned broadcast media, while the number of privately owned radio and television stations have had difficulties in their establishment and growth.

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), the regulatory body established in 1993, has not been able to control the unnecessary professional interference of government particularly in the granting of

broadcast licences to private stations. The final approval for broadcast licence still remains with Mr. President, after very long wait. This is certainly not democratic enough. It remains a negation of the deregulation policy. For an example, the Federal government-owned Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, in one year, established over thirty-two (32) FM radio stations; and more than 30 television rations by Federal Government came into being. The privately owned were until recent times awaiting result of their over two hundred (200) applications for radio/television licences.

Even a few privately owned stations that were granted licences have to pay between fifteen and twenty million Naira for the licences which are renewable by the same amount every five years. The government-owned stations don't pay as much, sometime they don't pay at all and they don't have to wait for long time before operating licences are given. In recent times, they were established in the same manner petrol stations are being established along the highways.

Therefore, the continued monopoly of the air waves by the government through Federal and State stations is not and cannot be in the interest of democracy and the public. Creating and expanding empires for government-owned stations cannot guarantee adequate dissemination of information for growth and development. FRCN and NTA should not only remain electronic media with network operations in Nigeria while others have applied and are not only granted because of much difficult conditionality. Certainly a monolithic media outfit cannot serve the needs of a pluralistic democracy. Therefore, government should review the media deregulation policy and grant more licences to the more preferred community radio and community television stations.

In my judgment, and in true democracy, the governments at the Federal and State levels have no business in the ownership and control of the electronic media. Therefore, it is suggested that the governments, should hands-off the ownership and control of radio and television in Nigeria. They (governments) should sell the shares to current and would-be staff of these stations and concentrate more efforts in the rehabilitation of agencies such as NEPA (PHCN), railways, education, water and sanitation, roads, waterways, airways and the security of life and property.

The higher the level of broadcast pluralism in a democratic nation, the higher

the degree of participation in governance and the better for the policy makers to make sound judgment on the other hand, the higher the degree of government monopoly of the airwaves, the poorer the degree of participation as well as the credibility of stations.

As we enter the new civilian-to-civilian transition, the power of the independent broadcast media as instruments and tools for good governance cannot be ignored. In my judgment, this is time the government (Federal and States) should hands off the ownership and control of the electronic media. If at all the Federal Government must participate, it should only retain the Voice of Nigeria (VON) as our powerful international instrument for relevance.

Excerpts from an address presented at a workshop on Building Sustainable Radio in Nigeria in Nigeria Academic Communities held at the University of Lagos, June 5-6, 2007.

**Prof Akinfeleye is Chairman and Head, Department of Mass Communication, University of Lagos, Nigeria.*

4

STEPS TO DEVELOPMENT-ORIENTED RADIO BROADCASTING IN NIGERIA

By Ayo Ojebode & Tunde Adegbola

Radio broadcasting in most African nations began as a colonial endeavour. In the case of Nigeria, it began in 1932 as an extension of the British Broadcasting Corporation. The primary audience and beneficiaries were the British working then in Nigeria. The language, of course, was English which was meaningless to the overwhelming majority of the people. The key staff, even years after radio broadcasting spread from Lagos into the hinterland, were BBC staff on secondment to Nigeria. Right then, radio wore the picture of an alien voice reaching to some alien people among the indigenous people. It was not the voice of the people.

But has this really changed? As Olorunnisola (1997) argues, even after independence, many African countries retained BBC staff in their radio stations as engineering and administrative consultants. Not only this, the first and subsequent sets of Nigerians to work under and after these expatriates were, understandably, the elite people who had received western education. It was understandable in that one needed some western education in order to function in the civil service within whose framework radio was located. These elite spoke the elite language, English, and their variant of the indigenous languages complete with elite metaphors, anecdotes and illustrations, not to talk of Anglicization of indigenous expressions. Having acquired western education, and one is tempted to add, values, these people could not fully be regarded as part of the overwhelming majority they were meant to serve. Thus, again, even after political independence, radio remained an alien voice, this time, reaching to the indigenous and westernised peoples. Radio has not been the voice of the people.

The alienation of people from radio is made more glaring by the location of stations in the cities, and worsened by government and commercial control

of the stations. For a long time, radio was unmistakably the voice of government rallying, instructing, even threatening people. (For instance, many of the jingles on the well-intended War Against Indiscipline of the 1980s were direct threats to listeners). The deregulation of the airwaves in 1992 did not serve to bring radio any significantly to the people, and was not intended to do so. Truly, there were many more stations, but they speak to the people and peddle merchandise to them. They are not the people's mouthpieces. The people, to borrow Jane Duncan's words, do not have a voice of their own.

The foregoing has consequences. Radio broadcasting in Nigeria takes place in an environment that is not conducive to meaningful engagement of development issues: the environment is neoliberal which predisposes stations to jettison development programmes and hanker after fiscally profitable ones. Fiscal profit comes from business organisations; fiscal and several other benefits come from patronising government. Located in urban areas, the stations are removed from the rural areas where the majority live. The physical separation is reflected in the content as well. The management style is authoritarian in most stations, the philosophy is pro-government and the equipment is in a terrible state.

Development issues are in the minority and in stations where commercial programmes are many, development programmes are few. Of all development subjects, human rights issues are the most rarely treated. On many interview programmes, the chosen guests are the ones not qualified to treat the issues being discussed while many interviews are not properly handled. Guests make impossible and incongruous recommendations which only show that they are not familiar with the peculiar situations of the listeners. Producers and presenters do not involve listeners in programme conception and execution. They think for the listeners and imagine what listeners' real interests are.

The English language (an exclusive preserve of a small minority of the country's urban elite according to Wikipedia) is used more often than indigenous languages in treating development subjects. This automatically puts at a disadvantage about 75% of the listeners. Worse still, the varieties of English spoken on many programmes are guests' professional dialects laden with jargons. In stations where attempts are made to broadcast in specific

indigenous languages, large segments of the audience who do not speak the chosen languages are neglected.

News, especially on government stations remains predominantly about government and government officials. Where the community makes the headline, it is most probably that the community is commending government or it is in crisis. The opposition is invisible in news except on private stations.

The listeners' verdict is that radio is doing only fairly well in engaging development. That too was the verdict of nearly half of the staff of the stations. That was what our content analysis revealed as well.

Six steps we must take

Given the prevailing environment, radio cannot better engage development, and this is in spite of the qualities of radio that endear it to development agencies and governments elsewhere. As Ojebode (forthcoming b) suggests, for radio to realise its potentials as a development medium in Nigeria, some far-reaching and major restructuring need to be effected, and the current media landscape must be altered.

First, and the one that requires the strongest political will, is that government should take its hands off radio. A truly public service system should be put in place. Public service stations are not government stations but public property. All government-owned stations should be turned to true public stations, fully responsible to the public. Their staff and management will be supervised by a coalition of civil society organisations, labour, religious bodies, the academia and other interest groups: The stations will be funded from three different sources: First will be radio license fees. Second, a fraction of the Petroleum Trust Development Fund (PTDF) and the Education Tax Fund (ETF) should be set aside for funding these stations. A third source of fees for the proposed stations will be occasional state subventions to be approved by the National Assembly.

The second suggestion towards making radio engage development more fruitfully is that government should stop vacillating over the establishment of community radio. Our study shows that radio stations are alienated from the community and from listeners. It is unrealistic to expect an urban-based

station which panders to the whims of government and the business sector to articulate the views and cater to the needs of the rural community. It is only a community station that can truly engage development in the community, and put the community in the driver's seat. An enabling legislative and licensing environment that will allow community stations to exist and thrive must be created. This includes creating a less expensive licensing regime for community radio.

Third, development planning and practice in Nigeria should be integrated. In Nigeria, different government and development agencies work independently and often at cross purposes. For instance, while advocates of the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS (and these include UNICEF) advise pregnant women and nursing mothers to consider alternatives to breast-feeding in order to reduce chances of mother-to-child transmission, advocates of exclusive breast-feeding (including powerful agencies such as the Baby Friendly Initiative of Nigeria) say No. Radio is often caught in this crossfire, confused and confusing its listeners. If the concerned agencies would sit with radio staff and a representative sample of the audience, and map out both strategies and messages, radio would be a lot more fruitful.

The fourth suggestion, which is related to the third, is the need to ensure that the tasks radio encourages people to perform in its jingles and programmes are feasibly supported by existing infrastructure. If radio asks people to dump refuse not in gutters but in government-provided trash-cans, there is need to ensure that such trash-cans exist in the first place, and that they are regularly emptied. If the message is that drivers should not drive against the traffic, government must ensure that both sides of a dual carriageway are passable. If radio makes recommendations that are not matched by requisite infrastructure, radio becomes less relevant and credible, and a feeling known as 'rising frustration' is elicited and nurtured among listeners (Ojebode, 2002).

The fifth step we must take is that government must support private stations in order for them to more fruitfully participate in development communication. Our study shows that these stations devote more time to development issues than do government stations. Supporting such stations will show that the government is indeed serious about its invitation to the

private sector for public-private partnerships (PPP) in the provision of social amenities. Such support is enjoyed by private stations elsewhere. In China and India, for instance, private media establishments enjoy extensive support from the government. In Indonesia, government even facilitated the establishment of private stations which also enjoy considerable government subsidies (Chadha & Kavoori, 2000). Such support could be downward review of licence fees and tax holidays for stations that demonstrate remarkable commitment to development

Finally, we suggest that Nigerian communication schools and colleges review their curricula to include topics on public journalism. Also known as civic or citizen journalism, public journalism seeks to put the citizens at the centre of news and reports. They are news sources and makers, not news consumers. If we want to make radio perform public service and engage development fruitfully, we need producers and presenters who are citizen-conscious and citizen-loyal. Those groomed under the civil-service yesmanship may have a hard time fitting in.

References

- Chadha, K and Kavoori, A (2000) 'Media imperialism revisited: some findings from the Asian case' *Media, Culture & Society*. 22; pp 415-432
- Duncan, J. 2006. 'From global to national apartheid: ten years of broadcasting in democratic South Africa'. In Anthony Olorunnisola (ed) *Media in South Africa after Apartheid: a cross-media assessment*. Lewiston: the Edwin Mellen Press, pp 37-112
- Ojebode, A. (2002) 'Radio Utilisation of Indigenous Programmes for Development in Oyo state' An Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Ibadan, Nigeria
- Olorunnisola, A. A. (1997) Radio and African Rural communities: structural strategies for social mobilization *Journal of radio studies*4:242-257

(This material has been adapted from a 2007 research/publication by the same authors, titled 'Engaging Development: Environment and Content of Radio Broadcasting in Nigeria.)

**Dr. Ojebode teaches Communication and Language Arts at the University of Madan, Nigeria*

Dr Adegbola is the Executive Director of African Languages Technology

5

ONE NATION, MANY VOICES

Sola Balogun

In 2000, Oumou Cudou Ali, then a 17-year old teenager suddenly fell in love with her village's

community radio station at Goudel. As a young, typical village girl who dropped out of junior

secondary school, there was obviously no employment for her in her environment. This was why an early morning announcement on *Radio Jeunesse* (the community radio headed by Nouhou Soumana in Goudel) urging interested youths in the area to report for work at the radio station became a timely succour for Oumou.

Located at Goudel, a sleepy town, about 25km east of Niamey capital of the Republic of Niger, *Radio Jeunesse* is one of the 89 community radio stations currently making waves in the West African country. And Oumou, like hundreds of her colleagues in their various communities, wasted no time to visit the radio station to show her interest. She was promptly engaged but was told her service would merely be a selfless service to her community.

"I instantly grabbed the opportunity", said Oumou who told *Daily Sun* that she was actually looking forward to serving her community especially through assisting the womenfolk. Her words: "I love to sanitise the village and environs. As a woman, it has always been my desire to improve the women's condition. So when I stopped school in Form 1 because I could no longer cope academically, I saw the new community radio as an escape route to realise my dream.'

Today, the 23-year old presenter and technician (she also combines this with the job of a salesgirl at Celtel; a major telecom company in Niger) is not only

passionate about her job at *Radio Jeunesse*, she confessed that her programmes have made her so popular. She hinted that many of her siblings, friends and relations usually call or visit her while presenting her programmes and that on the streets, she had become a star to reckon with.

Oumou's story is quite similar to that of every reporter/presenter that is recruited to serve in his/her community radio station in Niger. With a total of 89 of such radio stations spread over the seven states of the republic, Niger actually boasts of a vibrant culture of community broadcasting and is thus far ahead of many African countries in the use of radio for community development.

Although it is rather difficult in Niger to obtain a license to operate either a radio or television station, the country which is generally regarded as one of the poorest in the third world has nevertheless recorded tremendous growth in its rural development programmes. All these achievements, according to a few operators of the stations, are not unconnected with the roles and activities of the community radio station.

During a recent visit to Niger, *Daily Sun* discovered a booming culture of radio broadcasting at three major levels- public radio stations, private radio stations and community radio stations. For many years, and until 1995, government had dominated the broadcast sector in Niger. But with the birth of a few private radio stations such as *Anfani and Tenere*, which soon extended their transmission to other parts of the country, radio broadcasting in Niger did not only get decentralised, but also moved nearer to the people. In fact, the trend led to the birth of community radio stations, which were fully supported at inception by international NGOs mainly to serve the interest of the masses in their immediate communities.

In the words of Nouhou Soumana, Director- General of Radio Jeunesse Goudel (99 Mhz), the station actually grew out of a desire by the youths in the community to start a radio in 2000 as an agent of development and information dissemination. But it was the UNDP that eventually facilitated its take off. The youths contacted the UNDP, which provided training as well as materials such as transmitter, microphones, tapes and the consul while the community donated a piece of land on which the building was actually erected through voluntary service.

The station has since been run as a community project and virtually every member of the Goudel community is a stakeholder Said Soumana, "we have always been modest as a result of limited funding. Apart from our regular reporterst/presenters, club members and groups in the community also conduct interviews with villagers on behalf of the station and we run these alongside other programmes on development, education, health, agriculture, culture and entertainment as well as AIDS awareness and democracy. My station also acts as a bank of programmes for other stations because majority of these stations (located far away from Niamey) do not have electricity and thus find it difficult to transmit programmes in the night, Also many of our programmes are produced on partnership basis and are further duplicated and disseminated to other stations in diverse languages- French, *Hausa, Djerrma, Fulfulde and Tamatche* but 80 percent of our programmes at Goudel are aired in the local tongue; Djerma, coveringa bout 50km.

For Boureima Soumana, the Chief de Station of *Radio Marhaba de Kabe*, located 20 kilometres west of Niamey, the station was created in 2002 but it launched its progmmes formally *on* January 23, 2003 courtesy of the U N DP. The latter again provided all the materials for a smooth take-off of the station, which comprises 56 villages, over 300 thousand inhabitants and a coverage area of between 45 and 50 kilometres.

Explained Boureima "At the beginning, about 120 clubs supported the station but as time went on, the interest was not sustained and because we can only generate power through solar energy, we couldn't transmit programmes in the night and we were forced to reduce our transmission area from 50km to 15 km. When we started, we were transmitting twice daily between 12noon-3pm and 8pm-10pm but because of technical problems owing to lack of electricity and materials, we have reduced transmission hour to between 11 am and 3pm.

Explaining further, Boureima hinted that when the station contacted U NDP for another assistance, the NGO insisted Radio Marhaba cannot be singled out for assistance except when it was ready to benefit all the affected community radio stations. But the station also boasts of people-oriented programmes as well as a sustained community participation.

At Simiri Radio which operates on 95.1 Mhz in Zinder region, the chief of station, Mousse Hassan, told *Daily Sun* that the radio commenced transmission on October 10, 2001 through the assistance of B/M, an NGO through the *Agence Nigerienne de Promotion du Population (ANPP)*. The later provided materials including the consul, the transmitter, tape recorders, cassettes among others to enable the station to start off. But the vast land and the entire building housing the station was made.

available through the cooperation of the 79 clubs in Simiri. Today, the station has 15 members of staff and covers about 58 km with such interesting programmes centred on education, information and sensitisation. Some of these are *Zarmaganda Mate Ni Kani* (Hausa), *Portrait d' artiste* (French), *Sante Magazine*, *Zarma*, *Avts et communiquees*, *Quisine Evasion and Musique Arabe*.

However, as a way of making the community radio stations to serve the people more effectively and without bias, almost all the stations abhor airing of religious and political programmes. When asked, the chief of stations explained that the various sponsors such as the UNDP, FAO, HKI, Karkara, Africare, AIF among others have urged the various communities to be wary of politicians and clergies who might turn the stations into tools of victimisation or vengeance against their competitors.

But the fact remains that majority of the community radio stations in Niger need consistent funding and support to survive. Although government is yet to give any allocation to either private or community radio stations in Niger, it would be desirable if the sponsoring agencies sustain their material support for a considerable period of time before handing over ownership and management to the communities.

(This article was first published in the Sun Newspaper.)

**Balogun is the Arts and Review Editor of The Sun Newspaper, Lagos, Nigeria.*

6

ANOTHER ABANDONED PROJECT?

By Kazeem Akintunde

Has THE COMMUNITY radio initiative of the federal government finally joined the nation's long list of abandoned projects? This is the question being asked in several quarters of the country. Nigeria, despite its resources, has no community radio stations. Community radio stations are usually the most effective means of social and economic mobilization through dissemination of information to the grassroots. The idea of establishing community radio stations in Nigeria only came during the administration of former President Olusegun Obasanjo.

While in office, Obasanjo had set up a committee to develop a policy framework for the establishment of community radio stations for the country. The committee, chaired by Alfred Opubor, professor and former head of Mass Communication at the University of Lagos, was charged with the task of developing policy framework for the project. The committee succeeded in putting together a draft policy, which was submitted to the federal government.

But since then, the draft policy has been gathering dust in the cupboard of the Federal Ministry of information. A non-governmental organisation, Institute for Media and Society, IMS, is now campaigning for the revival of the idea. The NGO has argued that community radio stations, when established, would serve as a springboard for rural and community development in the country.

Akin Akingbulu, IMS executive director, told Newswatch in Lagos last week that Nigeria is the only country in the West African sub-region that does not have community radio stations. "It is sad that Nigeria, with over 140 million people, cannot boast of one community radio station. What we have are radio stations mostly in the urban centres whose stock in trade is to play

music from morning till evening without any meaningful message being given to the people that could aid development," Akingbulu said.

Sources told Newswatch that Obasanjo wanted to establish community radio stations because of his belief in the efficacy of the stations as a medium to aid grass-root development particularly in the area of education. He actually wanted the community radio stations to be used to reduce the level of illiteracy among the rural populace in the country which was then put at 51 percent. Nigeria still has an illiteracy rate of 51 percent with wide gender disparity of 62.5 percent males being literate, while only 39.5 percent females are literate.

The former president had also said then that 62 percent of the estimated 7.3 million children of

Primary school age who were not receiving any formal education were girls, pointing out that Nigeria's development would be slower unless something drastic was done to bridge the disparity. And to put the issue on the front burner, IMS in conjunction with Panos Institute West Africa, PIWA, recently held a two-day evaluation and strategic planning seminar on the need to build community radio stations in the country. Participants at the seminar urged the present government to implement the draft policy which they believe would lead to the formulation of necessary legislation on the establishment of community radio stations.

Dr Umaru Pate, a senior lecturer at the Department of Mass Communication, University of Maiduguri and an advocate of community radio stations in the country, said Nigeria is the only West African country that does not have a policy on community radio stations. "All the other West African countries have policies and not only policies, they have existing, robust and functioning community radio regimes. Here in Nigeria, there have been attempts by individuals and groups to convince the government to initiate and promulgate a policy on community radio," he said.

Mark Ojiah, director, policy at the National Broadcasting Commission, NBC, confirmed to Newswatch that indeed, there are no community radio stations in the country now but added that plans were on to establish them in the nearest future. "Yes, we do not have community radio stations in Nigeria now. A community radio station is a medium of communication established

by the community, run by the community and for the benefit of that community which is not for profit making" Ojiah said. He said the NBC was presently transiting from analog to digital and that once that is completed, appropriate framework would be put in place to facilitate the establishment of community radio in Nigeria. He however, noted that 10 radio stations have been established in universities offering Mass Communication.

Efforts to speak with John Odey, minister for information on the matter was unsuccessful as his phones were switched off.

There are over 70 radio stations across the country. Majority of, the stations are based in urban centres while their mode of communication is predominantly in English language.

(Material culled from Newswatch magazine).

**Akintunde is Associate Editor with Newswatch news magazine, Lagos Nigeria.*

7

THE RADIO REVOLUTION IN MALI

By Is'haq Modibbo Kawu

My conceptions of radio; its philosophy, the studio ambience, the cult of professionalism and the programming formal, were constructed in the context of my experience of working on radio for twenty years, from 1977 to 1997. In that period, I was employed by Radio Nigeria (the old Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation, NBC). I became a pioneer member of staff of Radio Kwara, when Nigerian broadcasting was restructured by the military in 1978, and I would later report for Radio France International and the BBC World Service.

In this multi-faceted encounter with different broadcasting traditions, I developed certain fixed ideas about the way radio works; that conception was however 'overthrown' by my most recent visit to Mali. I was in that country for a ten-day period to study the experience of community broadcasting, an experience in which Mali is a clear leader in the African continent.

It is important to point out that the Malian experience with 'grassroots' or 'community radio' must be located in the sad experiences of its most recent history: it's a history of the dictatorship of the military regime of Colonel Moussa Traore. The regime laid waste a country that already carried a burden of underdevelopment. By 1991, the people rose up to say enough of dictatorship. This uprising was met by a massacre by the military regime.

Badr Ali Koita is the administrator of the oldest Community Radio in Mali, RADIO BAMAKAN. He told me that many people were taken to the hospital and they needed urgent blood transfusion, but the Malian national radio was not available to the people, as an avenue to make an appeal for blood donation. It took a courageous appeal on Radio France international, by Lawyer Demba Diallo, for the people to voluntarily invade the hospitals to

donate and to save many lives.

It was the bitter experience of those days that taught the Malian peoples the lesson that the monopoly of the state over the radio spectrum must be ended, and radio should become the property of all Malians.

This background was also reinforced by Modibo Diallo, long accepted as the father of the movement that gave birth to the Community Radio in Mali. Today, he works as the Director of the Modibo Keita Memorial, the monument/complex dedicated to the memory of the founding President of Mali, Modibo Keita, an outstanding figure of the Pan Africanist movement, who together with Kwame Nkrumah and Sekou Toure, represented the radical bloc of African states, after independence from colonial rule in the 1960s.

Modibo Diallo told me that the period after the overthrow of the dictatorship of Moussa Traore saw elements of the new democratic movement analyzing the lack of an alternative to government propaganda. 'These materials of propaganda (on government-owned radio) were not relevant to the people,' he said. This was because "programs were mainly in French in a country where the majority of the people, more than 90 percent, did not speak French," according to Modibo Diallo.

He said that if democracy meant pluralism, then they were determined that the media must be pluralized in the new Mali. The context was also fortuitous for the campaigners for the new radio movement, because six months after the March 1991 overthrow of the military dictatorship, the National Conference held in Bamako. The National Conference settled the pattern of public affairs in Mali, and one of the major resolutions of the conference was that access should open up for a private participation in the media.

There was also an Italian angle to the radio story in Mali; this is because Italy had been from the 1980s, the pioneers of free radio stations in Europe. So at a time when France had only about three stations, Italy had hundreds of these low-powered stations.

In the midst of the debate about radio in Mali, Italian experts working on aid project in Keyes, felt that what Mali needed were community radios and the

project in Keyes included a radio station that was to assist with information on health, education and related issues.

Modibo Diallo and his colleagues in the movement went ahead to form the Bamako Free Radio Association (*ARLB in the French acronym*) in May 1991. *The laws about the radio movement were explicit, if one belonged to the radio movement, you could not belong to the ruling body of apolitical party, and you cannot use the radio to promote political goals.*

With the information of ARLB, members got the basic minimum materials to start a radio station; these included two microphones, a 20 watts transmitter, 250 watts amplifier, a stereo recorder, and *RADIO BAMAKAN commenced test transmission in August 1991, becoming the first free radio station in Mali.* That act was to be the commencement of a complete revolution in the airwaves in Mali; but that belongs in the future.

The commencement of test transmission by RADIO BAMAKAN created so much excitement in the Malian people, that another voice could be heard on air apart from the official Radio Mali. People besieged the modest setting of the station located in one of the markets of Bamako, and before long the police authorities went visiting to close down the station, because it was not authorized to broadcast.

Modibo Diallo remembered that listeners were very angry about the closure of the station, and that forced the then, newly appointed Minister of Communication to hold a press conference to explain why the action was taken. Members of ARLB attended the press conference, and in the sweep of the democratic wave in the country, turned the press conference into an open debate about the laws regulating broadcasting in Mali.

The minister had posited that members of the radio movement needed to apply to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) for licences before they could broadcast, but it was shown to be false, because the transmission power of the equipment could not take the broadcast signals beyond the borders of Mali into neighbouring countries. Besides, the transmission would be on the *Frequency Modulated (FM) band, the extant Malian laws which dated back to colonial law of 1936, did not even anticipate the use of FM bands.* Members of the ARLB also argued that National Conference had recommended the promotion of private radio

stations, and government was obliged to allow them. The association was a gathering of citizens, not a political party, and they felt very strongly that they were protected by the law to exercise their liberties.

The minister had also wrongly interpreted the existing laws to mean that broadcasting was a monopoly of Radio Mali, but even that position was shown to be untenable. Before long, it became impossible to retain the status quo; so members of the radio movement reached an agreement with government to temporarily suspend transmission, in order to allow the government settle the issues of regulation of private broadcasting in the context of the democratic development of Mali. Eventually, an agreement was reached which allowed Radio Bamakan to earn its métier as the first private, free private, free station in Mali. It was allowed to broadcast at first, for 30 hours a week on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. At the same time the government began to adopt the legal codes to regulate private broadcasting. Four month later, the Presidential order on the operation of private broadcasting was signed into law. This gave Mali one of the most democratic radio laws in Africa.

This fact was confirmed to me by Moussa Keita, the president of the Conseil Supérieur de la Communication (CSC), the regulatory body of broadcasting in Mali. Moussa Keita confirmed to me that there are today three hundred and eighty radio stations in Mali, and as a matter of fact the *frequency patterns allow the possibility of having 2000 radio stations in the country.*

Moussa Keita said that the law establishing the CSC came into existence in 1992, and traces the liberal context that facilitates the radio movement in Mali, to the struggle against the military dictatorship in 1991. It was also a fact that radio had even come into existence before the effort to regulate them through the Conseil Supérieur de la Communication.

Today people don't pay any money to establish a radio station in Mali; the condition is that you must be Malian. If an individual has the basic sum of money to procure equipment, then he or she can open a station. It is very democratic. Moussa Keita underlined the fact that the laws in Mali forbid the arrest of a journalist. If a journalist has a problem with the security forces, then the CSC is informed. A journalist can be arraigned before a court of law, but cannot be arrested by a policeman or a gendarme. "It is just not possible,"

said Moussa Keita.

The Community radio stations have become an important part of Malian social life, because they are owned by the people and they speak the language of the people, such that even the President of the country cannot touch them, according to the President of the regulatory body, the CSC, Moussa Keita. He then illustrated the importance of radio, with a story of 37 stations which opened without permission. "I closed them down, but very old people from the villages came to my office to beg us to open the stations.

"The process of coming into existence as a radio-station is also clearly established now, according to the CSC boss. "You apply, we check the availability of frequency, by the CSC informing the comite de regulation de telecommunication. If the frequency is available then the radio station is allowed to use it, otherwise a new frequency is allocated." No money is paid to start a station, but each year, a frequency allowance of CFA 10,000 is paid by the station.

The radio format in Mali is diversified; they have what is called the commercial radio and the radio associative. The radio associative is further divided into (a) community radio (b) cooperative (c) confessional radio, and finally the cultural station. Of course there is the public service broadcaster, Radio Mali. It is the combination of all these stations, especially the community stations that give Mali its reputation of being the centre of the most diversified experience of radio on the African continent.

These different stations have been organised into a body called URTEL DU MALI, which means the *union of radio and television of Mali*. URTEL was established in 1992, in the wake of the upheaval in the country, and was formalised in 1995, with four original members: Radio Bamakan, Liberite, Kayra and Radio Rurale du Kayes. Today 178 radio stations are members of URTEL, and the President is Yaya Sangare.

Yaya Sangare told me that ninety percent of the radio stations in Mali broadcast in local languages, and they get the communities to be part of the plurality that radio has come to represent in Malian society. "Mali is a nation of oral traditions, so the radio has helped in the expression of people's origins as an oral culture. People accept messages of development easily in Mali, when they are set in the radio mode, thus facilitating the process of

development," according to URTEL President, Yaya Sangare.

I have stated that Mali 'overthrew' the original conceptions I had in my mind about radio. This is because, I saw how a functionally minimal amount of infrastructure can be used to produce radio. There was also the fact that Malian community stations are often located in buildings without any pretence about grandiose surroundings. These stations are run by people within communities, with a few of them being permanent employees. Most of the radio stations use freelance contributors within the communities that host the radio stations.

Most of the community stations run inter-active programmes that have become especially popular with the widespread use of mobile phones. The fact that most broadcasts are done in local languages, 'Bambara, Sonhrai, Fulfulde, Tamachekh, Solinke, Malinke, and even in Hausa, and in Gao, make it easy for people to take possession of these radio stations.

Coming from Nigeria, I was also pleasantly surprised that from Bamako, to Segou to Kati, I did not see a single radio station that was using generators to run their operations. I have run a broadcasting outfit in the past in Nigeria, and I know that the purchase of alternative forms of energy has always been a significant item of expenditure. This is not a problem in the Malian setting, and I think this is very significant Mali has a lot of lessons to teach in respect of the democratic process; a very progressive constitution that entrenches basic freedoms and liberties; a radio movement that has been actively conducted by the people in communities, and the exemplary use of local languages for broadcasting purposes. These have confluenced with the widespread use of mobile phones.

(This report was originally published in Daily Trust newspaper.)

Kawu is the Chairman of the Editorial Board of Daily Trust Newspaper, Abuja, Nigeria.



WHERE IS THE NATIONAL POLICY ON FREQUENCY MANAGEMENT?

By Y. Z. Yau

Two weeks ago, a friend drew my attention to an international conference on frequency spectrum management, which held in April, 2008 in Johannesburg, South Africa, for African countries. It was meant for the countries to share their national experiences on frequency spectrum management issues. The reminder took me back to my days as a telecommunication student where one of the early lessons was to treat radio frequency spectrum as a national resource that had to be managed judiciously.

In the early 1980s of course, the issues around frequency spectrum management were more international than national. This was the period when the technologically advanced countries were trying to pick all the available slots on the geo-stationary satellite orbits. It was also the period when there was a debate about the international direct satellite broadcast, which some people saw as capable of undermining the sovereignty of some nations.

Today, with increasing need for frequency for our ever-expanding demand for fast communication, the issues around frequency spectrum management are pre-eminently national, even as they are contextualized by international standards and agreements. It has also become an economic resource judging from the money generated by the auction that was organized for the award of the GSM licenses. Which is why today, most countries that have a proactive communication sector have appropriate frequency spectrum management policy.

On impulse from the reminder by the workshop, I logged on to the website of the National Frequency Spectrum Management Council

(www.nfmc.gov.ng) to download our national policy frequency spectrum management. I was entirely surprised that the policy was not on the website. My surprise was largely because Nigeria was one of those countries listed at the conference as having experience to share with the rest of the continent on frequency spectrum management. Instead of the policy, there was a one-liner comment that says the page (that is the one place where the policy should be) was under construction. Clicking on other pages also gave the same message of "under construction."

The copyright note at the bottom of the pages shows that the site was constructed and launched in 2006. This means for almost two years (and in this ICT driven era, two years can make a policy completely outdated), the managers of the website are still figuring out how to put the policy on the website. This is of course, if we believe that the policy itself is actually ready and available to be placed online for the public. A pertinent question therefore to ask is where indeed is Nigeria's policy? The

process to get a policy for the country started around 2005 following two related events. One was the overlapping role of different government agencies dealing with frequency allocation such as the National Broadcasting Commission, the Nigeria Communication Commission and a Frequency Management Commission under the Ministry of Communications. Such multiplicity of agencies in the turf created the possibility of inter-agency conflict and lack of coordination. The impetus on the government side for a policy document that would allow for smooth inter-agency coordination was therefore one of the motivations for the policy articulation process.

For civil society advocacy, the impetus was about the need to ground community radio in our country. Given the rural - urban dimension of digital divide in the country and the fact that rural people would be excluded from the cyber space due to both the limited penetration of IT infrastructure and the fact access to ICT is highly unaffordable for most people, it was felt that community broadcasting could provide a veritable means of bridging the divide. Nigeria is one of the few African countries that have failed to live by the Community Broadcasting charter which require segmenting the broadcast sector into public, commercial and community. The consequence of this is that community radio which is non-profit is treated in the same terms

in the country as commercial broadcasting, thus making it impossible for communities to establish radio stations. As non-commercial entities, community broadcasting stations are not profit oriented and therefore it is not fair to charge them the same fees as commercial broadcasting stations for frequency allocation.

Civil society advocacy, conducted by the National Coalition for Community Radio led by the Lagos based Institute for Media and Society (IMESO), therefore had hoped to use the platform of frequency spectrum management policy review to anchor the demand for a separate community broadcasting radio licensing processes and procedures. It therefore demanded for a clear policy of spectrum allocation and made strong case for this.

In 2006, the government set up a Committee to draft a policy on frequency management. This draft was made available to the public in May that year and several stakeholders made serious inputs for the consideration of the committee. However, soon after taking inputs from the public, committee and process of articulating the policy went silent and therefore there has been no outcome in the form of an approved policy from the government. One of the key demands of the advocacy was that license should be free for community broadcasting. Already the government policy draft had indicated that the agencies responsible for allocation of frequencies could waive the fees for certain categories of users. Civil society organizations want an explicit mention of community broadcasting on the list of users that should qualify for fee waiver. This way, communities could be able to apply and obtain licence to set up community radio and television stations.

Since the initiatives on the policy went silent, there is also a corresponding silence or lack of action on the issue of community broadcasting in the country the earlier indication that government was drafting an instrument to allow for different licencing procedure and conditions for community broadcasting seems also to have melted into the air.

It seems that incompleteness of the National frequency management council's website is due to the lull in activities that could lead to the final 'approval of the National policy on frequency spectrum management. It is important that the relevant organ of government revisit the process by re-empanelling the committee to complete its assignment. If on the other hand, it has completed

the assignment, the government should publish the policy for the public to know its content.

(This piece was earlier published in the Daily independent newspaper).

Yau Coordinator of the Centre for Information Technology and Development of Kano, is also a columnist with The Daily Independent newspaper.



BUILDING PEACE WITH RADIO: LESSONS FROM LIBERIA

By Frank Sainworla, Jr.

BACKGROUND

I must say how gratified I am to be here in Abuja, the beautiful capital of West Africa's superpower, Nigeria, a country that will ever be credited for its towering role in helping to rescue my country, Liberia, when it was deeply consumed in one of the most fratricidal civil conflicts ever recorded in the history of this sub-region.

When the first civil war started in Liberia on the eve of Christmas in 1989, this writer was reading Mass Communication at the University of Liberia in Monrovia and at the same time a Freelance reporter for the Daily Observer Newspaper. Later, after hostilities subsided, school resumed and I was able to complete my studies few years later, finding myself in the state-owned Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS).

So I have come face-to-face with violent civil conflict and all the filth that goes along with it. I lived through the 14 bitter years of brutal civil war and covered it actively for radio, except for ten months (2001-2002), when I was awarded the United States Hubert Humphrey post-graduate diploma fellowship in the US for mid-level professionals around the world.

USING RADIO TO FUEL & PREVENT CONFLICT:

No one should underestimate the enormous power that the media wield, especially radio in our part of the world. Herein our West African sub region, radio is considered the medium of choice, because it is portable and can reach far and wide amid poor transportation and communication infrastructure. But experience has shown that the media area double-edged

sword. While radio and other media outlets can be a force for good, they can also be a force for evil, with the potential to tear society apart and engender hatred and fuel violent conflicts.

Having actively practiced journalism throughout the course of the now ended 14 years brutal civil war in Liberia, I do have a deep sense of understanding of the great potentials radio has.

First, in order for radio to serve as a force for good, its role must be clearly understood. This potent medium which BBC's Mark Doyle once said is considered "King in Africa," must be seen and used as a vehicle to influence positive change; promote peace by providing early warning to prevent violent conflicts; as well as promoting democracy and national or regional integration.

The ultimate objective of any media outlet must be to promote the public good. The media, particularly the independent/public radio has a greater responsibility to promote the public's interest or "seek the greater good for the greater number". To take a few lines from the journalist's creed, "the public journal is the public trust." In other words, the radio's role is to provide "voice for the voiceless".

For instance, when all is lost for the ordinary citizens in terms of a proper justice system, many people went to my radio station and others that give them a voice to tell their stories, condemned the senseless war and cry for peace, unity and national reconciliation.. On many occasions even when the police stations had reopened, these individuals would run to my radio to complain about their rights being violated or about other civil domestic matters. At the radio station that I currently work for, we had on several occasions encouraged citizens to first take such complaints to the police or rights groups such as the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission U PC) and see what redress they would get; then they can follow up with the media. Many of them have followed that path and it is part of our social responsibility to encourage and promote the practice of the rule of law; as the media's role is not to serve as the police station or the court. in short, testing the system.

As experience has shown in Liberia and other countries over the years, getting the space to play this role effectively does not come on a silver platter, not even if there is constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech and the press. For example, Article 15 of the Liberian Constitution that came into effect in January 1986 guarantees press freedom, but past regimes deliberately flouted this provision. The reality has shown that state authorities have often lacked the political will to allow the law to prevail. And this space is even more dangerous to secure amidst political upheaval or civil war.

Even with these rights, those of us in radio and the media must exercise social responsibility, which is part of our professional code of conduct and ethics. However, it must be mentioned here that some media practitioners have abused the right to perform this noble role, either willfully or by ignorance due to lack of training. Like in other spheres of life, the media can only thrive in an environment of peace and stability. In order to genuinely play this role as a vehicle to promote peace and influence positive change, radio must first build the trust of the people by being credible. Credibility is key if radio is to maximize its power and influence in preventing conflict, building and sustaining peace.

Radio and the media can establish this credibility by being committed to pursuing the truth without fear or favor, yet being politically neutral. There is *no* way that Radio can gain the respect and confidence of all sides in a conflict if radio stations or newspapers *are* professionally, politically, socially and religiously biased in their reportage.

Our experience in Liberia during the war clearly showed that the listening public was and still is the best judge, and eventually the goats were distinguished from the sheep. Even if a professionally upright radio station was not loved by party or parties in a conflict or anyone of the political forces, it was certainly respected as the voice of the voiceless.

During the course of the Liberian civil war, we saw radio being used both as a force for good (peace and national unity) and as a force for evil (intolerance and escalation of violent conflict), although far from the scale seen in Rwanda.

In Liberia for example, several years ago there were some radio stations that

became the theater for fuelling the civil war and spreading negatively dangerous propaganda that eventually caused the conflict to drag and that of course led to the loss of thousands of innocent civilian lives. In one scenario the radio station of the most powerful warring factions in the 1990s (NPFL) ran a propaganda report that it had captured a certain part of Monrovia and that rice was being distributed to starving civilians.

Hundreds of unarmed people perished while surging to the area to get badly needed food; and that was only propaganda. The truth of the matter is that that faction was far from capturing that particular place, let alone the area being safe for food distribution.

Former President Taylor owned and operated the largest media chain in the country at the time, which was extensively used for his NPFL rebel propaganda. After Taylor won the Presidency in 1997, one of Liberia's local dailies, THE NEWS newspaper said several years ago: *Taylor is setting up more and more media institutions to sing his song, The good news is that despite the determination of the Taylor regime to smash the free press, the very independent journalists in Liberia are also determined to continuously uphold the torch of press freedom."

There were countless numbers of instances where the media were used to spew hatred, all sorts of divisions and further armed clashes, leaving to more carnage and destruction of properties.

On the other hand, there were numerous instances where the forces of good prevailed over the forces of evil, as was seen through the positive use of the media. Several things happened: some of the media (including mine) even at the peril of the lives of personnel underscored the senseless nature of the fighting; highlighted the atrocities/destruction; and the need to stop the madness as there could be no victor through the barrel of the gun, thus the need to stop it and pursue the peace process.

judging by personal experiences and experiences of other colleagues, such stance paid off in a great way and helped to propel both the military and civilian stakeholders into action to initiate peace talks that led to the signing of peace agreements with the latest being the comprehensive Accra peace agreement signed on August 18, 2003. Getting there for the media did require persistence, courage, nationalism and networking among media

houses to pursue one common objective i.e. to end the war, bring peace, national reconciliation and free, fair and transparent elections.

It is certainly not a one shot deal. The airwaves and pages of newspapers had to be saturated with contents that bring issues and personalities to the fore by highlighting the need for peace in a sustained manner. Never mind threats and intimidations, but look at the bigger picture of saving the nation or our region from further carnage; but of course taking the most precaution to spare your neck so that you can live to tell another story or repeat what was done if need be.

Let me share this experience with you. Beneath the horrifying moments on reflection, pleasant memories will continue to be cherished by me and other colleagues at the state-run Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS) during the first round of civil war in Liberia in 1996, known as the April 6 Monrovia fighting. As Editor-in-Chief of the state radio I, my boss and a skeleton staff had to run the only news organ in the theatre of conflict in the city center for nearly a month of daily battles. Located in the high rise Ducor Hotel on the hill overlooking the capital and protected by the ECOMOG intervention force, we had a choice to make whether we should blindly be the mouthpiece of the then 5-member transitional council government which included Charles Taylor's NPFL and Alhaji Kromah's ULIMO-K, or be the voice of the voiceless. We chose the latter and were assured by ECOMOG that both our *personnel* and the station facilities would be protected.

By then, our radio was the only media house on the ground covering the fighting from inside the city center. War-weary Liberians, the international media, western diplomats and United Nations agencies depended on our reports, in order to know the trend of things. Minute by minute, when

Taylor's propaganda radio located outside the capital was giving slanted accounts, we were putting things in their proper perspective through our news stories, feature programs and live talk shows gave balanced analyses of what was transpiring.

Because of that, both of the armed groups fighting at the time (Taylor-Kromah government force and Roosevelt Johnson ULIMO-) remnant of the late Doe army) hated our coverage and wanted to put our broadcast out of action. The latter made two unsuccessful attempts to capture the station from ECOMOG

but they were beaten back. Taylor got very angry when I hosted my regular PRESS TALK show discussing the need to end the fighting because no side was winning, review the then existing Abuja Peace Accord and put the peace process back on track. Taylor summoned my boss and myself to his Congo town residence to order the program off the air and issued a final warning that the station should broadcast as a government radio. There were threats and intimidation, but we did not waiver.

Meanwhile, the local and international pressure for the fighting to stop grew stronger. And a few days later the US embassy, which recorded all of our audio reports and West African Leaders pushed for ceasefire and soon the belligerent forces were in Accra for yet another peace conference.

Similar approach can be used to prevent violent conflict and build peace. In Liberia during the first round of election in October, radio and the media in general were to a large extent very helpful in ensuring peaceful elections through educating and informing voters that it was their right to exercise their franchise and that election was the best way to do this. Radio was also used as a positive tool for conducting voter and civic education that led to a nearly 75% turn-out of voters in the first round of elections. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the National Elections Commission (NEC), local and international elections observers as well as ordinary Liberians themselves all praised radio stations and other media outlets for contributing immensely to overall success of the process.

To underscore the power of radio in facilitating peace and credible elections, this is how the ECOWAS elections observer mission to the 2005 Liberian elections summed up radio and the media's contribution in its report:

'The media particularly the mainstream radio precinct remained professional, and non-partisan in the coverage of the election. The theme of their broadcast was appeal for calm and peaceful campaign and election. They were pre-occupied with public education and enlightenment of the electorates. However, a section of the print media was overly partisan. There is need for the media to exercise caution and display professionalism in the conduct of their work, especially in this sensitive period when the general public awaits the election results.'

But the tendency to use radio for bad reared its ugly head in the period

leading up to the second round of the presidential election in November. Some radio stations and other media entities and journalists began to lose focus of their social responsibility and allow themselves to be used by some politicians to muddy the water, by whipping up tension and engendering ethnic and regional divisions.

That began to reignite ethnic hatred between the so-called indigenous Liberians and the America-Liberians or Congos. It reached a point that the potential for violence emerged. But thanks to the efforts of the Press Union of Liberia, media houses like my own RADIO VERITAS that tried to be above the fray and other stakeholders, the action of some of these media institutions and practitioners were brought into question. And with a meeting of minds, reason prevailed and those bent on muddying the water were encouraged to stop turning the media into a hate tool and promote an electoral process that was based on the real issues affecting Liberia. Eventually that paid off and the run-off elections passed off peacefully and orderly.

I can say with pride that the European Union (EU) and its media monitoring unit comprising Liberians from the civil society monitored 14 radio stations and other media outfits during the electoral process and my station, RADIO VERITAS was among those given thumbs up for pushing peaceful elections by their professional reportage and educational programs.

ROLE OF COMMUNITY RADIO

The role played by community radio in Liberia in recent years is increasingly becoming relevant and outstanding. A need assessment survey carried out by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and other media development group put the number of community radio stations in Liberia at 57 across the country, with 37 of them active. It is no doubt that community radio in Liberia has grown not only in number but in quality and influence. As a Consultant Trainer for UNMIL and the UK-based International Alert's Liberia Media project, I have traveled around the country and seen the level of influence community radio stations are beginning to have. Some of the community radio stations in rural Liberia have established affiliate relationships with few of the stations in the capital, Monrovia including my own radio. By this the stations in Monrovia are able to get wider national

coverage through relay of news and other informative and educational programs promoting peace and reconciliation as well as development.

Excited by this new professional alignment, several community radio journalists volunteer their services as stringers for my radio stations and few others in Monrovia. For us we assist them with mobile phone cards and a token from time to time to serve as encouragement. What this has done is that it is making radio program content in the capital not only Monrovia-based but richer and wider in scope reflecting the views and activities of the rural population. For example, I host a thrice weekly talk show called, TOPICAL ISSUES considered by many as "popular", which is relayed every week by at least 16 community radio stations in central, western, northern Liberia in addition to daily news and other programs.

CHALLENGES

However, the biggest challenge lies ahead in the months and years ahead, as radio and other media must strive to manage the very high public expectations, while holding the feet of the newly elected officials to the fire to ensure that they deliver on the fabulous promises they made during the elections campaign. This campaign is being made even more enormous considering the fact that this is the second time that Liberians have democratically elected their leaders after two wars in the past 14 years. To do this effectively, radio stations must help our war-weary people and leaders to build a democratic culture.

As Liberia in the post-elections and post-conflict period, we must all be reminded that the holding of successful elections alone does not automatically bring peace and sustain stability. Credible elections do provide the opportunity for lasting peace and serve as a reasonable deterrence against fanning the flames of conflict. Peace can only become a way of life if it is sustained. The media's role is no doubt very crucial in building this peace through the promotion of those things that unite us; by preaching religious, political and ethnic tolerance and by providing a voice for the voiceless, with seeking the truth being the centerpiece of our reportage.

Our brothers and sisters in Africa and the world can learn a lot from our experiences by insisting that radio and the entire mass media play their rightful role to prevent eruption of violent conflicts like what happened in Liberia. Our brothers and sisters in Guinea, Kenya and other countries that have not yet tasted rebel war and full scale civil upheavals must also ensure that the mistakes we made in the past should not be repeated by them. Our African colleagues must always remember that press freedom will not come on a silver platter.

Radio is power and we must give equal access to all groups in the society to air their views but of course in a responsible manner that would prevent conflict and promote peace.

The sacrifices must be made to achieve a free and vibrant press, remembering that the ultimate press for press freedom is "eternal vigilance".

It is no doubt that the challenges to doing an effective job of promoting peace and reconciliation are great, with debilitating financial and technological limitations serving as principal barriers. Radio Journalist, Broadcasters and other media personnel in Liberia are poorly paid and lack incentives. Can you imagine, they have no health benefits nor do they have insurance coverage? As a result, the media as a whole is experiencing brain drain of some of its trained professionals, who are seeking greener pastures in government, the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, etc.

CONCLUSION

Having experienced the bitterness of war and prolonged political violence, the radio practitioners and other journalists can only be hopeful that never again will their country choose the path of the bullet to replace a government. This is why besides striving to report in a balanced, fair and accurate manner, some of us post-elections Liberian radio journalists are also keen on playing our civic journalism role to educate and inform citizens about their rights and responsibilities in the society, vis-a-vis the government.

For example, I carry a segment in my talk show called, "constitutional tips" in which I read an article from the Liberian constitution regularly as a means of

educating the public on what the organic law of the land says.

Indeed, through the airwaves and given the media's role as "agenda setter", radio practitioners in Liberia and other African nations must continuously focus on the need to avoid the terrible mistakes of the past. One thing for sure the ordinary *people* and the elite are listening and the watchdogs are certainly watching.

I end this presentation with a mission statement I coined for my radio talk show at the height of the Liberian civil war that I sign on with on every edition:

"On TOPICAL ISSUES we say, let's agree to disagree, dialogue not confrontation, speak your minds always so that we can right the wrong."

(He first made this presentation at a seminar on community radio development in Abuja, Nigeria, February 19-20 2008)

**Sainworla is Manager at Radio Veritas, an independent station, in Monrovia, Liberia.*

10

HOW COMMUNITY RADIO AIDS DEVELOPMENT

By Ayodele Ale

When it comes to touching the lives of the people, community radio holds the ace. And what makes community radio different is the fact that unlike the big stations that are owned by either the government or moneybags, community radio is exclusively owned by the community people and run by the people, for the people.

"The programming is community oriented and no individual can claim ownership of a community radio as it belongs to the entire community," says Executive Director, Centre for Media and Society, Mr, Akin Akingbulu, who has been engaged in the process of getting the government to license community radios in Nigeria in the past three years.

According to Freedom House USA's Mr. Dapo Olorunyomi, governments across the world have been seizing the community radio opportunity to court the grassroots and effect desired changes.

"In terms of disease or epidemic control, getting people to understand governmental policies, conflict resolution, bringing aids to areas of natural disasters and others, community radio becomes a potent tool," he said.

Interestingly, while other countries in West African sub-region can boast of scores of community radio stations, the operation of radio station is still a big issue in Nigeria as no community radio exists due to strict conditions attached to the setting up of a radio station in Nigeria.

In Ghana for instance, the community radio experience is deeply rooted and the society is daily counting the gains that community radio broadcasting has brought into the system.

For instance, one of the top players in the Ghana community radio world is a

former Director-General, Ghana Broadcasting Corporation and consultant on broadcasting to the United Nations, Mr. David Ghartey Tagoe.

Some years ago, he led some members of Winneba community to establish a station popularly known in whole of Central Region, as Radio Peace.

"Each morning, the station wakes the people up with messages of peace, mediation, conflict resolution and transformation, before going into other things for the day," he said.

Radio Peace, which transmits on 88.9MHz-FM does not boast of a big office nor does it parade a huge number of staff, like the bigger stations located in the cities. But the fact cannot be contested that it commands a great respect in the region and it is a darling station for farmers, artisans, market women, cultural groups, village associations and other sectors of the community.

Radio Peace is a community radio which has never, for once, let the people down in almost a decade of its existence, especially in the area of peace building, which Ghartey Tagoe said was the main thing needed in the region that has experienced turbulent decades.

In far away Ada, another part of Ghana, Radio Ada is also engrossed in the task of giving voice to the voiceless.

The whole Ada region was almost cut off from civilization until Radio Ada came, courtesy of Prof Alex Quarmyne, a former don with a university in the Philippines. Alex has a great ally in his wife, Wilna, a woman in her 60s who has accepted Ghana as home.

Apart from the varieties of music being played on the radio, every other thing is done in Dangme, the language of the region. And the essence is to instill a sense of belonging in the people, and establish the fact that Radio Ada belonged to the people of the Ada region.

Radio Ada which started broadcasting on February 1, 1998 could obviously be regarded as the biggest community radio in Ghana, having received generous donations from international donors.

Radio Ada's workforce does not come from the regular journalism institutes, polytechnics and universities in the Gold Coast. Rather, it comes from the market women, fashion designers, drivers, shoe makers, watch repairers and

others. "During important village functions, recorded tapes are brought to the station for use. Sometimes we use them like that, sometimes we edit them if necessary," said the station manager, Mr. Kofi Larweh, who noted that the station had become a launch-pad for many who were interested in broadcasting.

Radio Ada has also been used to correct the ills in the society, especially when there was hike in transport fare, which the people considered as unjustifiable. "Some women came to make an announcement that no one must pay the new fare and it held until the drivers were forced to revert to the old rate," says Larweh.

Radio Peace and Radio Ada are among the scores of community radios located in different parts of Ghana. A vast majority of the people in the rural areas of Ghana were living in the dark until the 1992 Constitution opened a leeway for the setting up of community radio stations in the country noted for its vast deposit of gold.

People quickly jumped at the idea and today, the community radios have seized the airwaves, while the acceleration rate of community stations like Royal FM, Radio Progress, Simli Radio, Radio Biyanc, Dormaa FM, Afram Plains Community FM, Apam FM and a host of others based on campus daily send jitters down the spine of the bigger stations.

"Community radio has become part of our society and I cannot imagine Ghana without community radio stations, says Eunice Dapaah of World Bank Office in Ghana.

A staffer of Radio Universe, University of Legon, Alhaji Abubakar Sidick, explained why "No station touches the rural populace as a community station does. The essence is to give voice to the voiceless and the marginalised."

This is a basic fact as the rural stations, have become handy tools in the area of mass mobilization and sensitization, disease control, including HIV/AIDS campaign, help during disasters and national emergencies as well as other occurrences.

Obviously, community radio experience has also been made easier through the relaxed registration procedure rolled out by The National

Communications Authority, which is the licensing organ that also oversees frequency distribution and management.

According to a Senior Manager with NCA, Mr. Joseph Codjoe, the application and authorisation fees are \$100 and \$2,000 respectively, while the annual renewal fees is \$800 or its Cedis equivalent. Upon the satisfaction of necessary conditions, the stations are allowed to operate unfettered.

Due to the experience of other countries, stakeholders in the media industries are already calling on the National Broadcasting Commission to license community radios in Nigeria.

According to Akingbulu, Nigeria has been missing a lot as a result of the absence of community radio stations.

He is persistently praying that the community radio experience would become a reality in a nation that prides herself as the giant of Africa.

(This piece was first published in The Punch)

**Ale, a journalist writes for The Punch newspaper, Lagos Nigeria.*

11

IN LIBERIA, COMMUNITY RADIO RULES THE AIR WAVES

By Kabir Alabi Garba

Erected on the hill - top of an abandoned diamond mining site in Tubmanburg, Bomi county, the premises of the Bomi Radio 98.9 FM was a beehive of activities that Thursday afternoon. At the reception were two military personnel from the Pakistani Battalion (PAKBAT) located few meters away from the station. Their warmth and friendly disposition were enough assurance that no 'evil' was intended.

These soldiers, Justin Cole, station manager, later told his guest from Nigeria, have become friends of the radio station. "They are stakeholders as far as sustaining this station financially is concerned," Cole further explained while trying to disabuse the mind of his apprehensive guest who was *on a* tour of the community radio station in the country. Courtesy: The Panos Institute West Africa, Dakar, Senegal in collaboration with Institute for Media and Society (IMS), Ikeja, Lagos.

As usual, they were around that Thursday afternoon to produce a jingle on a popular Pakistani festival, which would be run later on the Bomi Radio. But the producer that would handle the production was right in the studio presenting issues in the paper, a popular programme that reviews newspapers in Liberia. Therefore, the uniform men just waiting for the presenter who was almost through with the programme as the station would soon go on break from 12noon to 2pm. It operates for 18 hours everyday.

A modest structure of three apartments - reception, control room and studio - Bomi Radio station is a confirmation of the argument that setting up a community radio does not require huge capital outlay. Inside the studio were equipment peculiar to radio broadcasting - consul, sound mixer, tape recorder, microphones, turn-table, heaps of musicals and CDs among others.

"This studio serves two purposes," declared Cole. "Because I do not have a production studio, I do produce all the advertisements and jingles for our clients here in this studio," added the station manager.

Although owned by the Bomi community, Cole's appointment as its manager has historical connection. One man called Jegbe Sawo established it in 1982. An amateur radio station with bias for reporting its community. But Cole who was 19 years old partnered along with him until 1990 when the outbreak of war scattered the dream. In 1997, at the onset of what could be described as a temporary respite with the warlord, Charles Taylor becoming the President of Liberia, Cole returned home (Bomi) to resuscitate the station. Then, Sawo had passed on. But the tension in the land aggravated. He abandoned the project in 2002 and one year later, the 'architect' of the crisis and war, Taylor, was persuaded to 'step down'. Since then, Cole began to pick up the dream of managing a big broadcasting outfit with emphasis on radio television.

But capital disallowed him until '2004 when Mercy Corps saw the need of establishing community radio. They refurbished the old arrangement with new studio equipment such as transmitter, microphones, and tape-recorder, among others'. Cole narrated with nostalgic feeling.

In Liberia today, more than 20 community radio stations have benefitted from Mercy Corps' largesse. Chris Kiejouh of Radio Kakata in Margibi County had similar tale concerning the evolution of the station. It became operational on January 11, 2004 with Mercy Corps supplying the equipment. The humanitarian organisation also facilitated training for staff. But the burden of how to relocate the station from the present abode has devastated Kiejouh greatly. The revenue generated from announcement and request is not enough to pay the rent of a two-bedroom apartment located on the second floor of a storey building in Kakata town.

The mounting running cost has also become a burden. Electricity supply is a luxury in Liberia. Everybody depends on power generating set including the community radio operators. And the cost of gasoline to power the generator is beyond the reach of the average Liberian. This is aside the fact that poverty level is high in Liberia.

Samuka Gboyo, programme director of Y-Echo 93.5FM at the Unification

Town lamented the lack of modern transmitter and other facilities. The station still relies on the locally built transmitter powered by car battery. The radio operates only on weekends. Reason: the studio is located within YMCA school premises and the search for an alternative location has not yielded positive result.

However, these obstacles do not affect their programming. The consensus by the listeners across board is that, they are doing their best. In fact, the proliferations of the community - based radio stations is premised on the need to mobilise people at the grassroots especially for the last November 2005 general election.

Besides, there was also the need to sensitise people about the peace process that is going on. Thus, radio became the potential tool to actualise this objective.

But the election had come and gone and those community radios scattered across the country remain vibrant and up and doing. The successful coverage of the elections had rubbed on their significance as the veritable tool of communication especially at the grassroots.

But they have become forces to reckon with as far as communicating for development in all facets of human endeavors in Liberia is concerned.

Overwhelmed with joy, Emmanuel Johnson, station manager, Radio Peace 96 FM located at the heart of the sprawling Firestone Plantation City of Herbel noted the President, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf visited the station three times during the electioneering campaign period leading to her election as the Liberian President.

Before the arrival of Mercy Corps and other non-governmental organizations including United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in 2003, Liberian government efforts in broadcasting were (are still) believed to be much weaker than private and community efforts.

State- radio efforts have largely been concentrated in the capital, Monrovia, while community radio stations continue to spring up around the country. But many of this community radios were originally amateur radio stations that were operating with scarce to minimal equipment and materials. Research indicated that stations transmitters were locally built, while

antennas were hung on bamboo stakes and other production materials were comprised of various appropriated materials. It was this potential and amateur effort that drew attention and support from international donors and aid organizations such as Mercy Corps.

As at April 21, 2006, more than 50 community radios were listed to be in existence in Liberia out of which 39 were reported to be on air. Twenty-six out of those in operation have either received Mercy Corps' touch or on the waiting list. Bomi Radio was one of the beneficiaries of the organizations's support. And this is reflected in the quality of its productions and outputs. There were some that the group built from the scratch. For instance, radio peace 96 FM in Herbel, Margibi. It was learnt that the name of the station was derived from the negotiation with the Stone 105 FM management to help upgrade its equipment, an offer that was turned down for fear of losing the control of the station established by the workers of Firestone Plantation in Herbel. Desirous of having a footprint in Margibi, Mercy Corps went ahead to establish Radio Peace, few metres away from the Stone FM as both are within the same locality.

In fact the Peace Radio's station manager, Johnson who was part of the negotiation eventually left the Stone FM to become the station manager of Radio Peace.

In all, 15 counties makes up Liberia, and with the exception of one or two counties, there are more than one community- radio stations in each county.

In Bong, there are Radio Gbarnga, Radio Heritage, both in Gbarnga; Super Bongese (Sworokoko); Salala Broadcasting Service in Salala and Voice of Reconciliation (Palala).

Lofa host Radio Vision at Voinjama; Bakedu Radio; Radio Life -Zorzor; Radio Heilingee; and Radio Tamba Taykor.

Apart from Peace and Stone radios, in Margibi also are Radio Kakata, Sky, Y-Echo, and another Y-echo in Kakata. But its transmitter has been reportedly damaged.

Nimba has the largest concentration of community radio. They are 12 - Radio Nimba, Radio Sanweih, Radio Kergheamahn, Y-FM, Radio Shalom, Voice of Hope, Radio Saclepea; Radio Ylamba, Radio Voice of Flumpa;

Radio Kam, Radio Beaganlay, and Voice of Tappita. In Grand Cape Mount, only Radio Piso, out of the three stations in the county, is on air. The remaining two - Bo Community Radio and Radio Sinje-are off the air due to damaged transmitters.

Similar fate is being suffered by Radio Gbarpolu, which was reportedly packed up since 2005 and Voice of Gbarpolu that is waiting for Mercy Corps equipment.

All the three stations in Grand Bassa- Radio Gbehzohu, Magic FM, and New Station - are in operation. Both Rivercess and Sinoe have one Radio station each: Rivercess Broadcasting Service and Voice of Sinoe. Courtesy of Mercy Corps.

The other station in Suehn, Bomi county, Voice of Suehn- Mecca is off air. In Maryland, Radio Harper and Voice of Pleebo are loud and clear. Grand Gedeh has three with two functioning - Smile FM and Peace Radio 89.9FM. The situation of Grand Kru and River Gee is different. The Voice of Grand Kru, expected to start broadcasting in April, is in the cooler. River Gee, Perhaps because of its environment, waterside, is to have a community radio.

However, there are promises from Mercy Corps and International Alert, which are yet to materialise.

It is interesting to note commitment and sheer enthusiasm on the part of the members of staff (mainly volunteers and on part-time basis) of some of these stations have kept them alive. But generally, the fear of sustainability appears to be the beginning of wisdom for these managers. Some also complained about limited coverage due to the power of their transmitters. Few of them are operating with 50watt while majority have 35watt. This has affected their coverage and the desire to expand their operation. It appears there is no respite in sight. That is the biggest limitation. In spite of more than 50 community radio stations operating outside Monrovia, 50 per cent of the country is yet to be covered, lamented Wesley Antonio, programme and project officer, Liberia Community Radio Network (LICORNET).

Another complaint is the heavy running cost which some of the station managers said they could not meet. Although revenue is being generated

through advertisements, requests, announcements and promos, the revenue, they asserted, is not regular, and at times not forthcoming at all. Support from NGOs and international donor is limited in most cases, to training and capacity building for staff. But the cry for sustainability has attracted the attention of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) as it has decided to conduct a series of three-day community radio sustainability training workshops at six locations outside Monrovia in June 2006.

James Wolo, UNMIL public information officer revealed that the organization "is currently seeking partners to help support the workshops which are aimed at empowering all 40 community radio stations in Liberia". According to Wolo, UNMIL also plans to conduct a "training of trainers" refresher course in late June. Another programme in UNMIL's kit is "a project to create standard curricular for media training workshops and a business skills training workshops for Monrovia - based media.

LICORNET, according to Antonio, is planning a similar project to empower the stations to be able to stand on their own. It is like era of spoon-feeding has gone. Operators of CR should learn how to manage their stations now. The plan is to host a national conference to be sponsored by Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) for all the community radios. The idea is to bring them together and address problems confronting them with the hope of coming up with a national agenda. The conference is intended to bring about unity of operation and see how to solicit for facilities from international donors. "It is unfortunate that although their impact is real, they have not been able to cover the entire country. It is believed that with one or two powerful transmitters their operations can be improved upon. "For instance, they can be grouped into zones and regions and allocate one powerful transmitter like 500 watt or 1000 watt to each zone for effective coverage. That is our plan for now," noted Antonio.

This piece was originally published in The Guardian).

**Alabi - Garba heads Media and Arts at The Guardian newspaper, Lagos, Nigeria.*

12

NIGERIA OVERDUE FOR COMMUNITY RADIO

By Umaru A. Pate

INTERVIEW

Weekly Trust. How would you describe the development of broadcasting media in Nigeria?

Umaru A. Pate. There is a considerable improvement in the quality of broadcasting in this country and also if you look at the number of existing broadcasting stations from 1960 to date, there is a considerable improvement and also the number of stations offering services today, have increased, they have also improved even though there are arguments on the quality of information they give to the people. But on an overall assessment, I think one can say that we are doing quite well particularly considering the liberalization what some people describe as the deregulation of the system. There are opportunities for individuals and interested members of the public who have the means to invest in setting up radio stations, television stations and offer alternative ideas to those that are publicly owned. If you also look at the government-owned broadcast media, the FRCN has expanded with FM stations all over the country even though there are complaints that the big zonal stations in Kaduna, Enugu, Ibadan and the one in Lagos are collapsing, their services are not as robust as they used to be, but we hope the government will see the need of reactivating them so that they can continue to serve as the big networks that they are supposed to be.

WT. What about the issue of community radio? Interested people have been looking forward to it and the issue seems to be in the cooler for a while now

Pate. One thing I must tell you is that in the whole of West Africa today, it is only Nigeria - which is incidentally the biggest of all and the richest, too - that

does not have a policy on community radio stations. All the other West African countries have policies and not only policies; they have existing, robust and very well functioning community radio regimes. Here in Nigeria there have been attempts by individuals and groups to convince the government to initiate and promulgate a policy on community radio. There are some impressions being given particularly in some government circles that we have a policy on that but if you take your time to go through the NBC policy, they cannot be described as community radio per se considering the cost and other prohibitive requirements. Sometime, before the exit of former President Olusegun Obasanjo's regime, it set up a committee *under the Federal Ministry of Information* and the then minister inaugurated the committee, gave it terms of reference which was basically to draft a policy, make recommendations to government on establishing community radio in the country. The committee, which I was privileged to be a part of, drafted the policy and submitted to the minister. The minister, while receiving the draft report, promised to push the issue to the Federal Executive Council.

However, for some reasons, that was not possible and ever since, the issue remained mute and we have been praying and hoping the present government will see the need of dusting up that particular report for consideration and possibly issue a policy guideline so that Nigeria will also be part of the global movement and Nigeria can also claim its leadership in the West African Sub-region of the media hype centre in the zone. But as it is, I can assure you, it does not paint a good picture of Nigeria being the giant and the only one without a policy on community radio. I think it is something feasible, it is something achievable, it is something that Nigerians are looking forward to and it is something that will contribute immensely to our development process at this time of our nationhood.

WT. What is the government doing on the issue of community radio presently?

Pate. I am not a government minister. I am not in the corridors of power so it may be difficult for me to tell you what is in the mind of government, perhaps you may have to contact the current Minister of Information or some other appropriate officials to be able to know what government is doing on the policy. But for me as an observer, an interested observer, I cannot see or read anything on the mind of the present government with regards to community

radio. We are just sitting and waiting and hoping and I hope the government will act positively and put Nigeria on the global map of those who own and operate community radio stations.

WT: But there is no effort by the professionals like you to see to the actualisation of the policy.

Pate: What you have to understand is that whatever move you want to make depends on the permission of government. One, you cannot award yourself a frequency to operate there are existing laws on operating radio frequencies, so you have to abide by the laws you must operate within official frameworks. So, if a community is interested in starting a radio station, it may have the ability but then, if the policy regime does not permit that, it will be difficult and if you look at the current licensing regime at the NBC, the cost is prohibitive. For example, if an individual is interested or a community is interested in starting a radio, it has to pay some licensing fee and this fee ranges between N10 million to N20 million. So, you can imagine how many communities can raise such amount and don't forget, community radio stations are not supposed to operate as profit-oriented radio stations when they eventually come to being. So, there are a number of impediments which do not permit a community to operate their radio station.

WT: Don't you think one of the reasons for the absence of community radio is because the government underrates the power of the medium in helping to redress issues of diversity and conflict in the country?

Pate: Whether we like it or not, the truth is that Nigeria is a diverse country comprised of different religions, a multi-cultural setting, highly pluralistic and community radio could help in strengthening the bridges between all these diverse groups, it could also help in making us understand ourselves better at the lowest level of the society thereby helping to strengthen the bond of unity. Currently, if you have only one radio station in a state, it will be difficult in some of the states, for example, for the station to even be able to cover the entire state. In several of our states, the state radio stations find it difficult to cover the entire land mass and second, you may not have the opportunity of featuring all the language groups in the state. Third, many of our local actors may not have the opportunity to feature likewise those at the lower level and several other issues, but if the people are allowed to have

their own radio stations at the lowest or at the closest point, they will have the opportunity to express their opinions. Don't forget, the community radio thing we are talking about is usually low power transmitter radio stations covering some limited radius of not more than 20 kilometres and then operating based on the ability of the community. It might not operate like the conventional radio stations starting from 5.30am or 6.00am to 12 midnight, it may not necessarily be so. They may operate just based on certain hours and they may not have to employ large numbers of workers. They may operate based on volunteerism by the people of the community and then several other ways of keeping them alive.

WT:: Don't you think the expected manner of operation is going to affect professionalism in the industry?

Pate. One, it means many of our unemployed mass communication graduates will have opportunities to be in broadcasting or the media profession, let me say. Second, the recommendation proffered is that it will be a way of training some of these community radio staff-and by that, their professionalism or their ability to perform would be strengthened. Generally, with the increase in the channels of broadcasting the profession itself would be enhanced. I am sure the policy if approved, will take adequate consideration of the professional aspect in the broadcast media. Here, I have to warn that it may not be like what you know in the conventional radio stations where we insist on higher degrees, we insist to a very high bureaucratic structure. The community radio will be a simpler one because it is supposed to operate in a community and reflect that very community. So, you have to give a sort of flexibility in the operation unlike what we have in the conventional private or state-owned radio stations. For example, a primary school teacher could be given a basic training on how to produce a program, he does that in his local language for his people.

WT. What about the issue of finance, who do you think will sponsor the stations when they come on stream?

Pate: On the question of financing, an individual may not be allowed to own a whole station at community level. It may have to be based on community participation and there may be a formula on how participation will be defined. Second, there may be donations. Third, there may be a fund where

government will be contributing to existing station like what they are doing to political parties.

Evan as I am talking to you, there are series of applications at the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) by individuals on the request to start community radio station, but as I said, the policy is not there and don't forget, even our educational institutions will benefit from this.

When we talk of community, we don't mean the physical community only; we also have community of interest, for example, teachers' community, all these are communities that may go into it.

(This interview was first published in the Weekend Trust newspaper.)

**Dr Pate, an Associate Professor, teaches Mass Communication at the University of Maiduguri, Nigeria.*

13

COMMUNITY RADIO AS A TOOL FOR EMPOWERMENT OF CITIZENS IN NIGERIA

By Akin Akingbulu

On receiving the invitation to speak at this seminar, my first reaction was to check the available literature on my table on Nigeria's basic social data in a few sectors. I reasoned that to engage the issue of empowerment of citizens it was important to understand the realities of life and environment in which they live.

I like to share with you some of my findings. In the health sector: there is one physician to every 3,500 people; maternal mortality stands at 800 per 100,000 live births; infant mortality rate is 100 per 1000 live births; prevalence of HIV/AIDS stands at 3.8 per cent; only 48 per cent of the population has access to improved water; and life expectancy for the average citizen stands at 43 years.

In the education sector: Although the 1999 constitution provides that the government "shall strive to eradicate illiteracy", general literacy rate still stands at 67 per cent, being 74 per cent for males and 59 per cent for females.

In the economy: moving from an economy sustained mainly by agriculture up to the late sixties, the country gradually moved into being a mono-product economy. The discovery of oil and its ascendancy into prominence in the international market has today positioned it to account for over 90 per cent of the country's export revenue and over 80 per cent of total government income. Mismanagement of the oil wealth and the decline in agriculture and industry have meant that even basic staple food items for which Nigeria used to be a major exporter are now imported, constituting a huge drain on the economy. Over 65 per cent of the country's 140 million people live below the poverty line.

What of infrastructure? The country's total power supply stands at less than

4000 megawatts at a time when total national demand is about 20,000 megawatts. Less than a third of the country's 193,000 kilometer road network is in good shape while the 3500 kilometres of railways are almost grounded. Little wonder that Nigeria was ranked 158th out of 177 countries in the 2007 annual Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

I believe these initial statistics provide a safe background to conclude that Nigeria has huge development challenges to tackle and overcome. I am able to see that government has put in place several strategies designed to tackle issues bordering on national development.

A National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) was launched in 2004. As we are told by government spokesmen, NEEDS seek to build a solid foundation for the attainment of Nigeria's long-term economic goals. It focuses on poverty reduction, wealth creation and human development which it seeks to achieve through reforming government institutions, growing the non-oil sector and implementing a social charter.

NEEDS has since been replicated in other levels of governance: SEEDS at the state level, LEEDS at local government level and, recently CEE DS at the community level.

The NEEDS-LEEDS programme has linkage with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through which the government hopes to address key development challenges. Nigeria's MDG targets address poverty, children, education, infant and maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS and other major diseases, the environment and international partnerships.

The present government has added its Seven-Point Agenda and seems to be putting it in the context of an upcoming Vision 2020.

Governments may choose to brand their development initiatives by whatever name. The key issue is that for any development initiative to succeed, it must position the people and communication at the centre. Communication is central to the lives of peoples and their communities, to the issues and conflicts that affect their lives. It is pivotal to good governance because the success of the interface between the leader and the led ultimately rests on a good communication process.

Genuine development can only be actualized if all sections of society are integrated into the communication process. The empowerment they get from ability to communicate and access to the communication process activates their participation in development activities. This is also to say that a society without the right attitude to communication soon finds itself embroiled in incessant conflicts and its development programmes in the throes of catastrophe.

What is the situation in Nigeria? Seventy per cent of the country's 140 million people live in the rural areas, but are denied access to modern communication channels and shut away from credible information on issues which affect their lives and communities. Most of them live and die, never having an appreciation of development and the possibility that they could participate in a meaningful building of their country.

The grassroots, home to the bulk of the country's population and the source of her wealth and strength, remain marginalized and voiceless. Little wonder that violent conflicts continue to erupt and escalate in many parts of the country, the formulation and implementation of public policy continues to "wobble and fumble" and the public generally exhibits scant appreciation of governments' development efforts.

Considering the size and power of existing media institutions, they should ordinarily be able to give voice to all sections of the population. But they lack the capacity to do so.

We must salute the performance of the media in helping to build the nation and its institutions, and in promoting democracy and development in this country. We must continue to credit their noble roles in the anti-colonial and anti-dictatorship struggles as well as in the consolidation of democracy in the past nine years.

But institutional and environmental factors have joined forces to reduce the capacity of the media, particularly radio, to equitably cater to all sections of the population. These factors include urban, elite and commercial dominance of media programming along the concentration of ownership in the hands of government and the business sector.

The new global approach to development emphasizes the people's greater





control over their own lives through active participation in deciding, planning and executing activities directed at improving their socio-cultural, economic and other conditions. It insists on fair access and effective participation in the media through giving all segments of the community the opportunity for expression in the local medium.

It makes the people both receiver and initiator of communication. It is not merely concerned with providing information on development activities, but also creates opportunity for them to engage new ideas for building understanding and development.

The tested and credible discovery as empowerment and development tool is community radio, now being used by hitherto disadvantaged and marginalized communities in all parts of the world.

Community radio has recommended itself and has been embraced worldwide because of its characteristics as the most accessible and effective medium of communication, particularly in societies where large numbers of citizens cannot read or write, but can speak and listen.

Community radio has distinct characteristics, such as:

-  they are owned and managed by communities
-  They carry community-oriented programming and produced by community members
-  they pursue strictly social development agenda
-  they use participatory methods in their activities

Reports from different parts of the world have consistently affirmed the benefits of community radio: it gives access to marginalized peoples and communities to communicate and foster true pluralism; empowers them to participate in search for solutions to issues affecting their lives and immediate environment; helps build capacities of societies to hold leaders transparent and accountable; help to eradicate poverty and support conflict resolution; preserves cultures; and promotes sustainable development.

Despite these great benefits of community radio, it is yet to occupy its proper space in Nigeria. Sixty years of government monopoly of the broadcast

sector and a further 16 years of private participation have still not brought about the flowering of community radio on the landscape.

Yet the consolidation of democracy and development in Nigeria require more active citizens participation which can only be facilitated by a media structure and culture which serves many more interests of many more diverse groups with greater precision and depth and which give attention to the fundamental and most crucial issues of the people's lives, such as education, food, health, environment, culture, among others.

The inaction of government on the issue of development of the community *radio* sector *has been of* concern to stakeholders for many years. Discussions and other activities got to a peak in 2003 when an Initiative on Building Community Broadcasting in Nigeria was launched in the country through a collaboration of the Institute for Media and Society and two international organizations, the Panos Institute West Africa (PIWA) and the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC).

The group instituted a Steering Committee which elaborated an Action Plan. This was followed by a series of zonal workshops in Ibadan (South-West), Bauchi (North-East), Enugu (South-East) and Kaduna (North-West).

The workshops which built awareness and interest among participants, also generated strategies for implementing the advocacy for community radio in Nigeria. The participants were drawn from community-based groups, other civil society organizations, academia, media, government executive and legislative agencies, regulatory bodies, international development agencies, among others.

Other activities followed during the years, leading to expansion in the penetration of awareness and interest as well as participation base in all parts of the country.

The umbrella body formed in 2005, The Nigeria Community Radio Coalition, has about 250 individual and institutional members.

I am glad to report that this advocacy has recorded significant outcomes which include strong awareness of CR and its benefits across the country, especially at the grassroots, and government reform efforts in policy and regulation.

The CR initiative recently conducted an evaluation of its advocacy work over the past four years. Findings from the exercise reassured us that the Nigerian environment has moved significantly in favour of the development of community radio and that the emergence of CR stations in our rural areas and other underserved communities is just a few steps away. We are encouraged by this and are raising the tempo of our advocacy activities.

Conclusion:

Community radio remains the tested and affirmed development medium for today and the future. It is the medium of the undeserved and development-minded citizen. It is one of the most urgent things which must occupy our nation's development agenda at the present time.

I urge my colleagues in the media to increase your commitment to the development of this important sector. I appeal to the government to create the appropriate enabling environment for the emergence of CR by releasing to the public, the three policy documents on its table, and to begin the licencing of CR stations.

**Akingbulu, Executive Director of the Institute for Media and Society, Lagos, Nigeria, originally presented this paper at a World Press Freedom Day event in May, 2008.*

14

APPROPRIATING MEDIA INTERACTIVITY FOR A TRANSITION FROM REPRESENTATIVE TO PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

By Tunde Adegbola

BACKGROUND

"Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.

Sir Winston Churchill

As man evolved from the state of the hunter-gatherer to the state of the cultivator of plants and the domesticator of animals, the need to manage the powers exercised over shared resources led to the development of mechanisms by which society can be harmonised. Without doubt, the best sold and probably the most bought mechanism for harmonising society today is democracy.

Democracy as a form of government vests the power to make and alter basic laws and even alter the form of government in the voting citizenry generally referred to as "the people". For reasons of practicality and logistics however, elected representatives usually exercise this power on behalf of "the people". It is this exercise of power on behalf of the people by their representatives that gives rise to the concept of indirect or representative democracy.

In contrast, director participatory democracy seeks to facilitate higher levels of consensus in decision-making and widen political representation. However, the wider the base of political representation, the more difficult is the management of its communication process.

Representative democracy is usually criticised on the grounds that the people may not be faithfully represented, either due to differences in political

philosophies that may exist between representatives and those they represent. One can even criticise representative democracy and argue that the processes of partisan politics (the basis on which representatives are usually elected) is fundamentally antithetical to representation. Representatives are usually constrained to tow party lines rather than freely express the will of their conscience or the common will of their constituents.

Yet another criticism of representative democracy is that the high cost of political campaigns leads candidates into making deals with either wealthy or influential individuals who would place their financial or social resources at the disposal of the representative in exchange for favourable policies and legislations, or as in the Nigerian case, delivery of a sizeable portion of the security vote is 'dividends' of democracy.

Hence, representative democracy is flawed on these grounds and so there is a need to seek to enhance the capacity for participatory democracy as a means of checking these flaws of representative democracy.

We recall that the core ideal of democracy is to enthrone the common will of the people and representation only emerged for reasons of practicality and logistics. If we look critically at the various difficulties associated with direct democracy however, we may discover that most of these difficulties emanate from the fundamental difficulty of determining and communicating this common will. In other words, we are actually dealing with a problem of communication. A good deal of the solution to these problems may therefore lie in re-examining the communication processes through which democracy is achieved. If citizens' access to whatever information they want or need is broadened, the increased information flow will allow them to present better arguments and take better informed decisions about issues which affect them and their communities.

Information and its communication

Communication may be defined as the exchange of information between two or more parties through a channel. The idea of an exchange-implies that the both parties in the communication process have access to the communication channel and so both have the capacity to inform and be informed. Therefore, a communication process can only be adjudged to have been effective if there is a built-in capacity for feedback in the

communication process.

Natural language by which humans communicate with one another is context sensitive. The same words said in different contexts could convey different meanings. The disambiguation of the various meanings may be facilitated by multi-sensorial communication, in which case more than one of the five human senses is involved in the communication process. On the other hand, the disambiguation may be achieved by multi-modality, in which more than one information mode is involved. In books for example, a diagram or a picture can complement a piece of text and thereby provide the context for disambiguating the content of the text. Regardless of the number of senses or modes involved in the information process however, the only guarantee for unambiguous content is feedback. Feedback provides the most important context in which the true unambiguous intention behind a communication session can be verified.

From the point of view of feedback, a communication process may be defined as simplex, half duplex or full duplex. Simplex communication is one in which only the sender has access to the channel of communication. In the case of half duplex, both the sender and the receiver have access to the channel of communication but they cannot both engage the channel simultaneously. In full duplex however, both the sender and the receiver have access to the channel at all times during the communication session and so are at liberty to send and receive information at any time within the life of the communication session.

Powerful as broadcasting might be, it is a simplex mode of communication. The feedback channel for information received via the broadcast medium has to be sought in other media. This is so, mainly because traditionally, the resources needed to achieve broadcasting are scarce and hence expensive. The broadcast spectrum is finite and the technology to exploit it was costly. For these reasons therefore, only the powerful and the rich had the capacity create opportunities for broadcasting. Consequently, governments and corporations tend to monopolise the capacity and are inclined to defend the monopoly due to their motives to utilize this one-way flow of information to their own advantages.

Multimedia and Interactive Media

Recent developments in digital technology have widened the scope of traditional media and evolved new media. For example, multimedia, which offers the capacity to merge many modes of information into one source, has changed the way people learn. Unlike traditional paper-based books in which text may be complemented with only charts, diagrams and pictures, multimedia offers the possibility of merging text, charts, diagrams, speech, music and even motion picture into one information source thereby enhancing the capacity for multi-modal and multi-sensorial disambiguation. Interactive media on the other hand gives the much-needed capacity for feedback thereby providing the opportunity for disambiguation by interaction.

It is the contention of this paper that these modern developments in digital technology can be appropriated to catalyse a transition from a purely representative form of to a more participatory form of democracy.

Models of Interactive Media

Most current models of media interactivity have been developed around the entertainment industry where they have been spurred by commercial incentives. Some of the most popular models include the following:

Reality TV

In its most popular brand, Reality TV attempts to transport the totality of the audience into the reality of the circumstances of a set of contestants on a TV show in a remote location. This is achieved by providing the audience with 24hr access by video and audio to the goings on in the remote location and facilitating periodical interactions between the audience and the contestants.

VoD: Interacting with video

VoD describes a wide set of technologies with the common goal of enabling individuals to select videos from a central server for viewing on a television or computer screen. It can be used for entertainment (ordering movies transmitted digitally), education (viewing training videos), and

videoconferencing (enhancing presentations with video clips). Examples of VoD models include Pay per viewTV,

Quasi VoD, Near VoD and True VoD. It should be noted that the same techniques applied in these technologies to deliver video could also be applied to deliver audio, even at reduced costs.

Forays into participatory democracy

These interactive technologies can be adapted to give better access to the means by which the common will of the people can be enthroned. Emphasis here is on the capacity of the people to react to and thereby affect the activities of their representatives.

Web-based interactivity

It is becoming the rule rather than the exception in many advanced democracies of the world for parliamentarians to offer websites as a means of better interaction with their constituents. These sites usually contain texts of political programmes and speeches. They may also contain pictures of projects and video images of presentations on the floor of the legislative houses.

More importantly, these websites provide the citizenry with the opportunity to react to the activities of their representatives. Hence, it is becoming easier for citizens to 'converse' with their political representatives about legislation on which they have opinions and due advantage of this ease should be taken to facilitate more participation and inclusion in the democratic process.

'Reality legislation'?

The concept of reality TV can be adapted to transport the totality of the citizenry into the goings on the floor of legislative houses. Periodical interaction between the citizenry and their representatives would provide better access to means of controlling the activities and mediating the positions of their representatives.

The regular broadcast of legislative proceedings in the USA by C-Span is an example of this sort of adaptation. Granted that the C-Span model is relatively expensive, possibilities in web casting has so reduced the cost of delivering video images that cost can no longer be used as an argument

against continuous broadcasting of legislative proceedings. After all the activities in these legislative houses are not supposed to be activities of a secrete society or a cult.

Electronic voting

Electronic voting is yet another avenue of exploiting modern interactive media to enthrone the collective will of the people. As a first step, voting on parliamentary issues on the floor of legislative houses can be done electronically in order to enhance the accuracy of results and to provide permanent documentary evidence of the direction of flow of legislators and other representatives.

Furthermore, this could be gradually improved to take on the opinions and positions of the generality of the citizenry into legislative decision-making.

Community Radio

Probably the most revolutionary of the recent developments in media that is encouraging a high level of interactivity is community radio. Many of the interactive media technologies and models enumerated above demand a digital infrastructure that may not be easily accessible. Radio however, is the most affordable and accessible of all Information Communication Technologies (ICTs). It certainly is the most democratized ICT in existence today. Hence, community radio will play a very important role in Africa's development as the information revolution unfolds.

Community radio broadcasting according to the African Charter on Broadcasting is "broadcasting which is for, by and about the community, whose ownership and management is representative of the community, which pursues a social development agenda, and which is non-profit."

The African charter on broadcasting goes further to define three tiers of radio broadcasting and encourage media pluralism within this three-tier structure. On the first tier is Public or State broadcasting, usually set up by governments to mobilise the citizenry for national or local government goals as the case may be. On the second tier is privately owned or commercially motivated broadcasting and on the third tier is community broadcasting as defined above.

As was pointed out earlier on in this paper, broadcasting whether radio or television is a simplex means of communication. This is the reason why the Yoruba refer to radio as *Asoromagbesi* (one who lacks the courtesy of accommodating a reply). In a bid to make this simplex means of communication more effective therefore, various means of achieving feedback have been devised. Some of the traditional means of achieving the much-needed feedback include radio requests and letters to the producer. Also of relevance are newspaper columns that comment regularly on the practice of broadcasting. In this regard, the regular *ThisDay* column by Onoshie readily comes to mind. More recently however, the use of the telephone and e-mail as alternative channels for feedback have improved the capacity of the people to air their views on radio with enhanced immediacy.

Community radio however, provides probably the most effective feedback channel for radio broadcasts in the sense that a community can respond to broadcast from other tiers of radio or from other community radios through their own community radio. They may not be reaching as wide an audience as the other tiers of radio, but at least they are responding to pertinent issues that concern them (probably in unique ways) and this response is available to the generality of those to whom it is relevant. Community radio therefore presents yet another level of media interactivity by which the people can apply necessary control on those who represent them.

Usually, community radio broadcasts are limited to a relatively small geographical area and this has led people to believe that radio communities are defined solely from a geographical point of view. Even though many radio communities are defined geographically, equally many others are defined around communities of interests.

Another common misconception of community radio is that it is necessarily rural in location. Even though rural people who are underserved by the commercial broadcast that usually originate from 'commercially viable' urban centres derive more benefit from community radios, this does not stop close-knit geographical communities or communities of interest situated in urban areas from operating community radio stations to cater for their unique community needs.

The popularity of community radios have increased in the past few years due

to recent developments in digital technology which have drastically reduced the cost of setting up a radio station. These technological developments have also improved the frequency selectivity of transmitters and receivers, thereby making for more efficient and much better spectrum management. Furthermore, by virtue of these developments in digital technology, it is now possible to multiply the capacity of the existing radio frequency spectrum by utilising digital techniques that allocate far smaller portions of the spectrum to each radio station. The only impediment to the full exploitation of these technologies at present is the need to make the appropriate receiving devices universally available

According to the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) in a 2000 document, "In 1985, there were just ten independent radio stations in the whole of Africa. Today, dozens of radio stations are being created". As of the time AMARC made the above statement, 500 community radio stations were recorded in Africa, out of which about 300 were AMARC members.

Statistics of the growth of community radio all over the world are staggering. While researching for this paper, many documents that could give an indication of the spread of community radio in West Africa were consulted. It became clear from these documents that the growth is so rapid that any documented figures quickly go out of date. It is interesting to note that none of the consulted documents mentioned any of the 30 community radio stations in which this author has been personally involved in Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau between 2002 and 2004. In fact, based on the anticipated ubiquity of community radio in West Africa today, it could be described as the poor man's Internet without much scope for error.

Because radio is relatively cheap and it is the most widespread ICT in Africa today, there is an urgent need to seek to appropriate community radio as an ICT of choice into our various development strategies.

Unfortunately, the value of community radio does not seem to be well understood or properly appreciated in Nigeria. The consequence is that the capacity to enhance the practice of participatory democracy by the use of community radios as a means of feedback within the broadcast medium has been grossly compromised. Various attempts to set up community radios in

Nigeria have been discouraged on the grounds of national security. This comes from an unfortunate misunderstanding of the concept of community radio. As of today, there are only three Africa countries that have not been able to take due advantage of the offerings of community radio, Mauritania, Guinea Conakry and Nigeria.

The only community radio broadcast licence that has been issued in Nigeria today is Radio Unilag and judging from the cost of the licence fee, a non profit approach may not be justifiable. Comparing this sate of affairs with what obtains in other West African countries gives a great cause for concern.

In Senegal, Mali, Niger, Benin Republic and most of the rest of West Africa, community radios are so popular that they have become integral parts of communication structures of various communities. In Ghana, there are so many community radio stations that even halls of residence in the University campuses have their own community radio stations catering to the peculiar needs of their resident students.

The potency of community radio as a catalyst for a transition from a purely representative to a more participatory level of democracy was rather eloquently demonstrated in Ghana during the 2000 presidential election in Ghana. The generality of Ghanaians were intent on a change in government and feared that the power of incumbency might be brought to play. Hence, armed with cellular phones, many strategic pooling booths were connected directly to one community radio station or the other and the proceedings of the elections in these booths were monitored on a minute-by-minute basis. With this enhanced level of interactivity, it became more difficult to subvert the common will of the people.

The success of the Ghanaian experience in community radio broadcasting is salutary to Nigeria. In my understanding, it dispels the so-called security scare that has been used to slow down the development of community radio in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In conclusion therefore, there is scope for a transition from a purely representative form to a more participatory form of democracy. This scope

lies in the democratisation of the various means of information communication and the technologies to achieve the required level of democratisation are within our grasp. All we need is the political will to appropriate these technologies. We need to start developing structures that will enable us take advantage of this scope.

Finally, I should not conclude this paper without anticipating critics of the democratisation of information communication channels. I have already touched upon the security dimension. Another excuse for slowing down growth in the process of democratising information communication channels is cost. Critics usually argue that the required infrastructure for achieving this level of participation and inclusion in the democratic process are very costly and they may be inaccessible to the very category of people whose voices they are designed to liberate. This argument remains valid only if we decide to live only in the present and not project into the future. Today we vote by printing on paper and it is not considered expensive. But there was a time in history when only monastic monks had the wherewithal to print on paper. So if we look back into history, we will derive the hope that will allow us to see far enough into the future. Considering the current pace of change in technology however, this future is much closer than we can ever imagine!

(The paper was first delivered at the 5th Biennial Conference of African Broadcasters (AFRICAST) Abuja, Nigeria, in October 2004).

** Dr. Adegbola is the Executive Director of the African Languages Technology Initiative, Ibadan, Nigeria.*