

New phase for Community Radio advocacy



Guest Speakers at the Policy Dialogue on Community Radio Development in Nigeria held in Abuja on Tuesday, 21, April, 2009

Radio occupies a paramount place in the society. And in many parts of the world, this potent tool has been used in the transformation of the society.

As a matter of fact no medium touches the lives of grassroots communities like the community radio, which places development and societal change on the palms of the people.

With community radio, members of the community become the architects of their fortune.

Interestingly, while many parts of the world, including neighbouring countries are tapping into this opportunity, Nigeria cannot boast of the presence of a community radio station. This has necessitated the birth of the crusade for the licensing of community radio in the country.

The advocacy for the development of community radio in Nigeria has therefore reached its sixth year. It began in November

2003, when eleven eminent citizens drawn from different civil society organizations gathered in Lagos and began the vital journey in the Nigerian media landscape.

The group, called 'Steering Committee' was given the mandate to design and assist in managing a plan of action which would midwife the establishment of a viable community radio sub-sector in Nigeria. The committee set to work immediately with full vigour.

A flurry of carefully and professionally packaged activities took the message of community radio to all parts of Nigeria. As awareness and interest developed in the grassroots and other constituencies, demands for reforms in policy, law and regulation in the broadcast sector were sent to the offices of appropriate government agencies. Within a short time, the community of advocates increased. A committed generation of Nigerians passionate about commu-

nity radio emerged.

They took up the challenge of ensuring the evolution of community radio broadcasting in Nigeria.

Years after, the results are astounding as many positive results have been achieved. Awareness and interest have translated into action in many grassroots communities where serious preparations are being made to set up radio stations.

Government responded positively and embarked on policy reform by ordering a review of the old National Media Policy and the design of a fresh community radio policy. Regulation has improved and substantial space is now provided for community broadcasting in the Nigerian Broadcasting Code. But community radio has not yet become a reality in our media landscape. Licences for the establishment of community radio stations have not been issued, and policy reform processes of government have slowed down drastically.

This is a critical stage. Community radio advocates are of the conviction that the work of more than half-decade which has produced necessary awareness should be made to see the light of the day.

Community radio must become a reality while stakeholders, including community radio advocates, decision-making bodies and those occupying strategic positions in government should keep policy, legal and regulatory reform policies on track and actualise the licensing and establishment of community radio stations. It is believed that there is a daunting task ahead. But the zeal, with the determination is there.

The publication of Media Vista which is aimed at disseminating the appropriate information and education to various constituencies is one of the initiatives towards this direction.

Senate Committee on Information supports radio pluralism

The Senate Committee on Information and Publicity has thrown its weight behind radio pluralism in Nigeria.

The Senate Committee on Information and Publicity has thrown its weight behind radio pluralism in Nigeria. The chairman of the committee, Senator Ayogu Eze who spoke at the 2-day seminar organised by the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition in Abuja said that the Senate Committee on Information was ready to assist to put in place the legislative infrastructure needed to bridge the communication gap between communities in Nigeria, with emphasis on building community radio in the country and enhancing media pluralism.

Senator Eze advised the engagement of all legislators and policy makers in a process of

dialogue to generate useful facts and help push for the realisation of Nigeria community radio. He expressed dissatisfaction with the absence of a single community radio in Nigeria, while other countries in the region could boast of well established community radio stations.

He stressed further that community radio would contribute to leadership development in Nigeria and buoy transparency and accountability in governance in the country.

He assured participants that the National Assembly was prepared to repeal all the laws that impede journalism practice in the country, while disclosing that efforts were being made to speed up the passage of the Freedom of Information Bill currently in the National Assembly.

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The crusade to have freedom of information law in place in Nigeria got a boost recently when President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua promised to sign the FoI bill into law as soon as it is endorsed by the National Assembly.

The FoI crusade suffered a setback when the former leader of the country, President Olusegun Obasanjo failed to endorse it after the fifth National Assembly of the country had passed the bill. But at the inception of the sixth National Assembly, the advocacy for the passage of the bill gathered momentum.

The president who spoke at the second Timex Global Communication Summit held in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory on "Legislative and Public Communication: the Way Forward," raised the hope of FoI advo-

President Yar'Adua promises to sign FoI bill into law

cates when he told the people present at the gathering that the presidency was aware of their plight.

"I am not oblivious of concerns of some Nigerians that passing the FoI bill will make information available in the polity and broaden legislative and public communication. I will not hesitate to sign it into law," the president said. The assurance of the president was contained in the speech read on his behalf at the summit by the Minister of State for Information, Alhaji

Ikra Aliyu Bilbis. The president noted that the lives of Nigerians would not be worth living, and that the democratic process would not be complete without effective flow and due access to information.

The two-day summit, which was attended by over 200 participants lamented the absence of a National Policy on community radio, which could be used as a potent tool in the public information system and therefore recommended the formulation of such policy without further delay.

Information Minister renews hope on Community Radio licensing, FoI Bill passage

The Minister of Information, Prof. Dora Akunyili has assured stakeholders that the Federal Government would be willing to issue licences to groups interested in community broadcasting.

The Minister, in the speech read on her behalf by Mr. Emeka Mba at the 2-day seminar organized by the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition in Abuja, commended the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition for embarking on the initiative and saluted the vision and resilience of the coalition for taking it upon itself to build a plural media sector in Nigeria.

Akunyili stated that Nigeria media had, with much robustness and a high sense of professionalism in the past years, performed creditably well and ranked high among its contemporaries across the globe.

She pointed out that "in performing its societal roles which include informing and educating the populace, acting as a watchdog, providing public oversight and facilitating government-citizens interface, the media ranks as a fore-

most promoter of democracy and development."

As part of efforts towards building a plural media sector in Nigeria, Akunyili told the gathering that the President was ready to assent to the FOI Bill once it is passed into law by the National Assembly.

She stressed that the promotion and actualization of plurality and diversity in media, along with a level playing field, had become a feature of the media landscape in Nigeria, with a characteristically diverse newspaper genres serving different tastes.

Focusing on the broadcasting sector, Akunyili noted that the removal of government monopoly in 1992 has produced a large number of commercial broadcasting outfits in television, radio, cable, among others, as well as new licences issued to institutions of higher learning in the country to support the delivery of educational materials.

While appreciating the large number of stations in the various sub-sectors of the broad-

cast terrain, Akunyili observed, however, that the largeness in number had not met the demand of the people for information. She therefore advocated a plural broadcast practice comprising a three-tier structure including public, commercial and community broadcasting.

She said government had started making a move towards introducing community broadcasting, listing the introduction of campus stations in several locations in the country as the first step in that direction, to service rural, suburban and other hitherto yet to be served or underserved sections of the population.

She expressed the readiness of government to work with other stakeholders to put in place an appropriate and up-to-date policies, laws and regulations to guide the implementation of programmes and expressed optimism that the completion of the two policy processes would provide a solid platform for activities in the sector, including issuing community radio licenses that would comply with international requirements.

Calling on the coalition to make recommendations to the government on how to fast-track the process of emerging community broadcasting in Nigeria.

How community radio can aid FG's Seven-Point Agenda -NBC

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) has identified community radio as a vital tool for achieving the Seven-Point Agenda of the Federal Government.

The Director-General of the organization, Engr. Yomi Bolarinwa who said this while delivering a paper at the 2-day seminar on Community Radio Development in Nigeria in Abuja on April 20 and 21, 2009, pointed out that community radio was essential in areas like power and energy, food sufficiency, education, land reform, health and so on.

Engr. Bolarinwa who was represented by a director in the organisation, Mr. Mujtaba Sada, noted in his paper that the unique characteristics of the medium stand it out as a distinct tool as community broadcast stations exist basically to serve the underserved or marginalised members of the community.

The NBC boss stated that community broadcasting service was owned by members

of the community, who jointly see to its management and development and benefit equally from its services.

According to him, community broadcasting must be controlled by the community and every facet of its operations, including management of facilities, funding and others should reflect joint ownership.

He noted that community radio has helped societies to combat the prevalence and spread of diseases including the deadly HIV/AIDS through the provision of adequate information to local communities. Speaking specifically on the Federal Government's Seven-Point Agenda, Engr. Bolarinwa explained "that in many parts of the world today, radio is demonstrating the capacity to enhance economic development, contribute to technical growth, improve health and education, strengthen national security, combat crime and corruption, give expression to cultural pluralism and promote

democratic process."

Speaking on the relevance of community radio to the attainment of quality education in the country, Engr. Bolarinwa said government had long realised the need to do something about the dwindling state of education in the country, which necessitated the decision by the government to approve the issuance of 27 campus broadcast licences by the National Broadcasting Commission to augment the efforts of lecturers. He also said that community radio could serve as a platform for meaningful dialogue among the people, and between the people and the government, instill a sense of belonging in community members and enhance agricultural development.

He cited the World Bank and National Fadama Development Project 2006 as a project aimed specifically at tapping the benefits of community radio in developing agriculture and promoting food security.

Community radio has helped democracy globally – AMARC PRESIDENT

President of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), Mr. Steve Buckley, has stressed the role of community radio in the global effort to attain sustainable democracy and development.

Buckley, who spoke at the 2-day seminar on Community Radio Development in Nigeria, organized by the Nigerian Community Radio Coalition in Abuja said community radio had led the way in most agitations for democratic rule around the world, describing community radio as a 'global phenomenon'.

He pointed out that the development of community radio in any part of the world has been intimately connected with democratisation, improved processes of governance, and more sustainable approaches to development. He traced the history of community radio back to the 1940s when the first stations were set up in Bolivian mining communities, and on the

west coast of the USA, while community radio has continued to proliferate in almost all the countries in West and Central Europe.

Buckley linked the emergence of community radios in Africa in the 1990s and its subsequent growth to the wave of democracy. Buckley noted that "not only can we talk about community radio having a role in democracy and development, but we can point to many examples across the world where that contribution is real and tangible".

He made specific reference to Nigeria, and said that though community radio was yet to be established in Nigeria, the experience he had in the U.K as well as other countries, had shown that the campaign for change in policy, legislation or regulation and so on can take time and it requires patience, resilience and courage. He thanked the Minister of Information and chairman of the Senate Committee on Information for their strong statements of support and

assured commitment to the genuine realisation of media pluralism in Nigeria.

On the imperative of a plural media environment in the country and the necessity for community radio broadcasting, Buckley noted that the low rating of Nigeria on the ranking scale of Reporters Without Borders' World Freedom of Expression Index attested to the fact that Nigeria needed to open its media space and give access to the country's diverse populace.

Buckley who believed that there were many weaknesses in the policy, legislative and regulatory environment of broadcasting in Nigeria enjoined the coalition to take advantage of the current legal situation and seek the intervention of the Minister of Information in licensing a limited number of community radio stations.

"Let us move from policy to action. And let us focus our talking today on persuading those who have the power to do so, to take the action necessary for community radio to commence in Nigeria," he said.

ON MARBLE

Here in Nigeria, we are yet to formulate a policy on the operations of community radio stations that could complement the existing structure. It may interest us to know that in the whole of West Africa, Nigeria remains the only country whose marginalized and underserved are yet to enjoy the benefits of community radio.

Prof Umaru Pate, Department of Mass Communication, University of Maiduguri delivering a lecture on the topic, 'Meeting Community Needs and Expectations through Sustainable Broadcasting in North East Nigeria' at a public forum organised by NBC in Gombe on March 19, 2009.

Community broadcasting has far-reaching social, political, economic and cultural advantages. African countries should ease off the stringent and regulatory requirements to encourage the emergence and facilitate the growth of community broadcasting on the continent".

Communiqué issued at Africast 2008, held at the Sheraton Hotel and Towers, Abuja from October 21st - 23rd 2008.

Digital content production and delivery will dramatically reshape the dynamics of the broadcast industry. The onus is on us to update our capabilities for digital broadcast or risk being marginalized.

Ben Eghuna, former Director General, FRCN, in his paper Models of National Broadcast Management: Choices for African Broadcasters in a Digitised Environment at Africast 2008.

"Radio and the media can establish this credibility by being committed to pursuing the truth without fear or favour, 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".

Frank Seriworlo, Manager, Radio Veritas Liberia at the Seminar on Community Radio Development in Nigeria, Abuja.



Nigerian Community Radio coalition members

African broadcasters call for concerted efforts against HIV/AIDS

The broadcasters who made the declaration at their summit in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire on April 30, 2009 noted that the present situation presents a huge challenge to development workers across the globe and more specifically, to Africa where the number of new infections continues to grow daily due to the lack of necessary information about the prevention, treatment, care and support of those living with HIV/AIDS.

While they believed that community radio holds the ace in the sharing of knowledge, dissemination of information and the coverage of HIV/AIDS, they called for partnerships between community media and other sectors of the society. According to them, community radio should also produce and broadcast specific programs on such topics as the impacts of climate change on agriculture, health, nutrition and politics; locally observed changes such as the drying up of water sources, green house effects, disappearance of vegetal and animal species; the effects of extractive activities and the strategies of communities to adapt.

"Community radio should also facilitate the understanding of climate change by the various community stakeholders and promote alterna-

tive technologies. We underline the importance, the urgency and the necessity for community broadcasters to assess the knowledge, attitudes and practices of the local population about climate change as the basis for program production," the media broadcasters said. The body also recommended the strengthening of the AMARC structure and the improvement of its functioning at the country, regional, continental and international levels.

"We recommend that institutional support from AMARC and its partners should be directed to national and regional networks in priority for advocacy to ever expand freedom of expression; to create and consolidate an enabling environment for the growth of community media, to reinforce capacities and to provide equipment. "Communication and communication rights are basic human rights and community radio is, by definition, at the center of a communication for development process that involves all the community.

"Community radio is not only a media outlet to reach a community, but also a project on its own right, that gives voice to the voiceless, empowers the excluded and fosters the community to express, to be heard and to organise itself.

How I became community radio advocate – Prof Opubor

Professor Alfred Opubor, university don and frontline community radio advocate speaks on his interest in community radio advocacy

More than 30 years after FESTAC 77, what have you observed in respect of Africanization of the mass media in Nigeria which you advocated at the colloquium of that event?

Is FESTAC really that so long ago! I suppose 'Africanization' was my way of addressing several issues: Orientation-an Africa-centered view of things, including news and entertainment; Style: deriving from orientation, an African-inspired 'manner'; Content: programming that is overwhelmingly African in content. The effect of all of that should be that anyone who accidentally tunes in to a Nigerian broadcast would have no doubt what part of the world it was coming from.

The report card on the Nigerian media along these dimensions is in my view, encouraging, though performance is mixed. News on AIT for example, is very Africa (and Diaspora) focused, especially in their daily "Kakaki". And NTA International has an abundance of images of Nigeria and Africa that are increasingly well-packaged.

Broadcast entertainment programming is therefore more and more African in orientation and manner. Popular music and Nollywood are unmistakably Nigerian in inspiration. Content is becoming so in many stations, though self-conscious attempts to be 'international' or global are retarding the potential achievements. Here's what I wrote recently, for another purpose, that may be relevant here:

The print media are attempting to be robustly Nigerian in their content; and that includes their grammatical failings! Unfortunately interest in the outside world, including in the rest of Africa, seems superficial, depending, as it does, in their cribbing from non-African news agencies and websites.

You have been a passionate advocate of Community Radio for decades. What informed your passion?

I went into communication studies in the mid 60s when definitions of development were getting polemical, with Latin American scholars, especially, challenging the prevailing western orthodoxy. By the time I finished my doctorate in 1969, the arguments were becoming strident, with our non-western colleagues sounding almost raucous. They were insisting that develop-



Opubor

ment should mean liberation, to be free to accept your heritage, to refuse to be defined by others, and to have the power to determine the future of your society; that outside experts did not necessarily have the solutions for the problems that rural communities were experiencing; that 'indigenous knowledge' had validity, and that progress in economic production should be matched by progress in feelings of self-worth. In the communication field, there was clamor for a new paradigm, to match the changes in general development thinking. Dialog, empowerment and participation were gradually creeping into the literature. For most people in the world, that would mean communicating in their own languages about their realities, with people who lived near them. That was the context in which I tried to understand what radio could do for us in Nigeria, when I returned home. It is well known that Unilag approached the federal military government for a radio license over 35 years ago, and was refused. We had wanted a tool to teach our students modern broadcasting skills; but we also wanted to initiate them into thinking about community media. Remember that not long afterward, Unilag Masscom began rural communication studies in Igbogbo, near Ikorodu. That would have been a perfect way to complement our radio programmes. Experiences in Mali and Mozambique in the 90s, helped to sharpen my resolve. I have determined ever since that we must initiate community broadcasting in Nigeria, so that we benefit from its potential impact on community development.

What is your assessment of the advocacy for community radio vis-à-vis the responses of government in Nigeria.

The situation is like dialogue with the deaf. The Community Radio Coalition has been vocally engaging a government system that appears tone deaf; unable to hear the important messages of its interlocutors. At one point, I thought the Obasanjo regime was listening, with the seeming

openness of Minister Frank Nweke to policy initiatives. But the expected outcome from the labors of the Community Radio Drafting Committee, which I chaired, was a government White Paper legitimizing community radio. It never materialized; and the movement appears moribund. The NBC, as regulator, is part of the problem, but more importantly, they could also be part of the solution. While CRC has received good and sympathetic hearing from NBC (proving that they are not tone deaf!), the NBC's structural impediment in being tied to the President's authority, has been a major hindrance in moving the agenda forward.

Recently, the government licensed some campus radio stations. What arrangement or institutional framework do you think should be put in place to ensure that these stations correctly serve the interests of the academic community and the society at large?

By the way, these campus radios are not community radio stations as understood in the profession and as defined by the African Charter on Broadcasting. But they represent a positive move forward in achieving pluralism in radio broadcasting in Nigeria. The first step is to make them independent of the campus authorities, including Vice Chancellors and Rectors. One way to do so is through a governance structure that is broadly based, involving university teachers, students, workers and representatives of the surrounding communities in a kind of management body to oversee the operations of the stations. Secondly they should reflect the academic vocation of our higher institutions through the quality of programs they broadcast; which will mean close collaboration with academic and research units for developing program ideas. Thirdly they should explicitly seek relevance to their off-campus surroundings through consciously reaching out to the outside communities in their program content. It would be excellent if the communities were invited to participate in designing and creating relevant programs, in an effective 'town-and-gown' relationship. To be self-sustaining (apart from specified grants from the authorities for student welfare, for institutional cultural development and for training in mass communication), the stations should be able to earn some income through restrained sale of airtime and commercials related to their constituency and mission. I have in the past advocated also that all of these campus radios be linked together in a loose national network to promote sharing of quality programming and capacity development. The institutions could be assisted to develop an appropriate framework for facilitating this network.

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