

**CONTEMPORARY
ISSUES IN
COMMUNITY
RADIO
DEVELOPMENT IN
NIGERIA**



Edited by
**Umaru A. Pate
& Ifeoma Dunu**

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**RESEARCH FOR COMMUNITY RADIO
ADVOCACY AND CAPACITY BUILDING IN NIGERIA:
EXPLORED VISTAS,
POSSIBLE FRESH DIRECTIONS**

*Ayobami Ojebode
& Babatunde Raphael Ojebuyi*

INTRODUCTION

Radio has been described as a potent agent of development. It has the peculiar potentials to break the barriers of distance and illiteracy. When radio is localised, its strengths are fully utilised to achieve true development because people are given access to the broadcasting opportunities and are able to articulate their needs within their culturally homogenous setting (Ansah, 1979). It is in recognition of this fact that various countries of the world, especially Latin American and African countries, have established community radio—a radio broadcasting system that allows members of a community to reach out to themselves in their language, and articulate their needs (Moemeka, 2009). However, Nigeria is yet to have just a single community radio station. As detailed by Ojebode and Akingbulu (2009), years of intense advocacy for community radio have produced no result.

Community radio advocacy, in the Nigerian context, had started long before the current phase of capacity building. Earlier in 1977, at the colloquium of the FESTAC, Alfred Opubor had advocated Africanisation of the mass media in Nigeria—a prelude to community radio. In the 1980s, scholars—Opubor, Moemeka, Soola among others—pioneered advocacy-tilted research for community radio. Findings and positions of these scholars created the platform for the new phase of direct advocacy that emerged in the late 1990s. In the

early 2000s, direct community radio advocacy experienced an upbeat with the involvement of stakeholders such as Nigeria Community Radio Coalition through the Institute for Media and Society (IMS), which has remained the arrowhead of community radio advocacy in Nigeria. For example, a listserv was created in 2004 to provide an on-line platform for interactions among community radio advocates.

This was followed by awareness seminars in Ibadan, Enugu, Kaduna and Bauchi. In 2005, IMS also organised a national seminar on community radio and community radio advocacy. Before then, a group tagged "Steering Committee" had been constituted in 2003, with the mandate to evolve and assist in managing a policy that would herald the establishment of a viable community radio sub-sector in Nigeria.

All of these snowballed into a phenomenon of aggressive advocacy and increase in the number of dedicated advocates of community radio. Majority of the grassroots people are now conscious of the relevance of community radio as a catalyst for developing their communities, and are eagerly anticipating establishment of radio stations that would be owned and controlled by the local people. But despite these aggressive advocacy efforts, and preparedness of rural communities to embrace the community radio project, Government seems to be reluctant to issue licenses for establishment of community radio stations. It has issued a white paper legitimising community radio, and embarked on policy reform, but these seem to have dragged too long.

It has been insinuated that government is not prepared to approve the establishment of community radio stations because of the fear that community radio can be used to facilitate inter-ethnic war (as it happened in Rwanda), and be employed to turn the community

people against the government (Moemeka, 2009; Ojebode, 2009). Reacting to this phenomenon, Opubor (2009) says that:

The situation is like dialogue with the deaf. The Community Radio Coalition has been vocally engaging a government system that appears deaf; unable to hear the important message of its interlocutors. The NBC's structural impediment in being tied to the President's authority has been a major hindrance in moving the agenda forward (p. 4).

But the community radio coalition has continued its determined advocacy in spite of these administrative and political impediments.

Reasons for Community Radio Advocacy

Many factors have compelled scholars and stakeholders to advocate establishment of community radio stations in Nigeria. In this paper, we identify three cardinal rationales for community radio advocacy—borrowed essentially from Ojebode and Akingbulu (2009).

First is the collapse of the top-down development paradigm. The top-down development planning, also referred to as the Dominant Paradigm, was the oldest approach to conceiving or describing development concepts. The paradigm emerged shortly after the World War II as a product of the developed nations' ambition to relieve the less developed countries of the traumatic effects of the war. Harry Truman, the then President of the United States of America, during his inaugural speech in 1949, proclaimed a development model that was presumed would accelerate development process in the developing nations (Soola, 2003).

This proclamation signified the genesis of the Dominant Paradigm,

an approach that uses parameters such as level of modernisation, physical infrastructural growth, economic success, massive industrialisation, and Gross National Product (GNP) to gauge development. But scholars have faulted this approach because one, it absolutely limits development concepts to quantitative economic growth, which may not translate to a holistic development; two, it neglects people's culture in conceiving development ideas; and three, it is purely top-down, conceiving development as planning for the people, but not planning with them.

The best alternative to this, according to development experts, is a participatory development—a paradigm shift which contends that true development is impossible without active participation of the people who are the primary beneficiaries of such development efforts. Apparently, to ensure that the grassroots people are actively relevant in development projects that directly affect them, there is the need for an effective two-way communication channel that gives the community people unfettered opportunity to participate in the development agenda. And community radio is just the answer (Okigbo, 1988; Soola, 2003; Moemeka, 2009; Ojebode, 2009; Ojebode and Akingbulu, 2009). Besides, community radio has the potentials to break the barriers of distance and illiteracy, which other mass media types may not be able to do (Wilcox, 1973).

The second reason for community radio advocacy is the evidence that community radio was contributing to development in other parts of the world. For instance in Bolivia, Brazil and other Latin American countries, community radio has been used to achieve cultural integration, political education and national unity. Radio contributed significantly to national unification drive in Brazil during President Getúlio Vargas's populist government from 1930 to 1945 (Hausen, 2005). Further impetus came from other less developed African

countries with copious presence of community radio stations. According to Moemeka (2009), despite progressive growth of community radio stations in many African nations such as Mali (120), Senegal (44), Burkina Faso (27), Niger Republic (24), Republic of Benin (22), Ghana (8), and Mozambique (25), Nigeria Government is yet clearly reluctant to issue licenses for community stations.

Finally, those concerned about cultures complained that central broadcasting was marginalising minority cultures. According to the proponents of this school of thought, Nigeria as a nation is at the receiving end because she is losing vast cultural resources that are fundamental to true national development. Scholars have, therefore, argued that to reverse this trend, there is the need for community radio broadcasting where the community people would be in control of the broadcast programmes and contents, and articulate community issues and needs, but not the wishes of government or those of its agents (Ojebode, 2009; Moemeka, 2009). Similarly, Ansah (1979) articulates the imperatives of localised radio broadcasting systems as he submits that:

In order that the potentials of radio can be fully exploited for development objectives, they should be localised as much as possible so that local cultures and usages can be integrated into programming, and local issues more comprehensively and more effectively handled. Localising radio should mean giving the people access to broadcasting facilities so that radio can be made a two-way communication channel as far as practicable. Local stations broadcasting to fairly small groups with a common language, culture, occupation and interests can help focus the people's attention on their more immediate problems and provide avenues for effective feedback (p. 1).

Without doubt, the grassroots people, when given access to the media, would see themselves as stakeholders in national development projects, and be willing to contribute their rich cultural resources without subjugating their cultural values. A decentralised radio broadcasting (community radio) is the answer.

Instances of Capacity Building for Community Radio

When stakeholders felt that much awareness about the imperatives of community radio had been created, they embarked on capacity building. Of course, when government eventually grants licenses for establishment of community radio stations, shortage of manpower to manage the stations may arise unless such potential managers or personnel are already on ground. However, when it was apparent that government was not ready to issue licenses for community radio immediately, community radio stakeholders began to partner with campus radio staff to develop manpower.

For instance, in November 2007, the coalition trained campus radio staff on community development principles and practice. The training was held in Lokoja. Also, in December 2007, in Akure, Ondo State, there was another training of campus radio staff on strategic planning. Similarly, in February 2008, campus radio staffers were trained on audience research and analysis. Two months later in the same year (April 2008) campus radio staffers were also trained on financial management and proposal/report writing. With these rounds of trainings, it is believed that whenever government grants the licenses for community radio stations, there will not be a total dearth of human resources to manage the radio stations.

Forms of Research Employed in Community Radio Advocacy and Capacity Building

The platform for much advocacy rests on some research findings

and scholars' call for action. Diverse methodologies have been adopted by scholars in this regard. The commonest is the critical discursive and evaluative approach which in our view, constituted about 70% of the total research findings that have shaped the directions for community radio advocacy and capacity building in Nigeria. These include Moemeka (1981); Soola (1988); Umukoro (1991); Olorunnisola (1997); Opubor (2000) and Ojebode and Akingbulu (2009). On the other hand, data-based empirical approach (survey, content analysis, field studies) accounted for the rest 30% of the forms of research involved. These include Alimi (2006); Ojebode (2002); Ojebode, (2003); Ojebode (2008) and Ojebode and Adegbola, (2007; Ojebode, (2007). It should be mentioned in some of these works, community radio gets mentioned in the recommendations sections only. It is described as part of the solution to the problems raised by the findings or preceding arguments.

Research Communication Outlets for Research on Community Radio in Nigeria

By outlets here we mean the media genres through which research findings, discussions and recommendations about community radio advocacy and capacity building get to the target audience. Four such outlets were identified:

1. Books and journals which account for about 50% of research publications on community radio in Nigeria.
2. Policy/advocacy documents/policy advisory which account for about 30% of research publications.
3. Theses and dissertations which account for about 10%.
4. Others such as newspapers, magazines, radio, television which account for about 10%.

Unfortunately, only outlets 2 and 4 were reaching policy makers, who are the primary target audience of community radio advocacy. The implication of this is clear: Just only 40% of the findings of research for community radio advocacy got to the policy makers while the rest 60% went unnoticed! Books and journals are always read, not by policy makers, but by the people in the academia, while theses and dissertation, no matter how outstanding their findings, are left to gather dust on the shelves.

New Directions

In order to add value to research for community radio advocacy and capacity building, and make researchers' efforts more relevant to the cause of community radio advocacy, we suggest some new strategies. These strategies are not, however, substitutes for the existing ones, but they can be used as complements.

Researchers should focus more on data-backed research that rely on empirical evidences. They should also employ experimentation with the campus radio stations. Findings from this form of research will provide 'real' not 'what-if' situations and garner stronger support from international agencies. This will also demonstrate results that community radio will conform to regulatory stipulations, and remove the suspicions that community radio stations might fuel ethnic rivalry and religious hatred.

Researchers should employ community-based approach to identify potential volunteers and the skills they need. This will surely facilitate effective capacity building. Constant interactions with rural community people will enable community radio advocates to appreciate the cultural peculiarities of these people and how such cultural values shape their world view.

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