

PATTERN OF COMMUNITY RADIO OWNERSHIP, REGULATION AND USAGE FOR DEVELOPMENT IN ANGLOPHONE WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract

Community radio is community owned, community based, community oriented and community operated. Community radio is targeted at fulfilling the information needs of the community, with special focus on development. There are issues about the ownership and control of community media in some countries which could affect the philosophy, goals and effective operation of community radio, especially in Anglophone West Africa. The study draws its theoretical framework from The Social Responsibility, which prescribes that the press should operate without censorship and the Agenda Setting theory which postulates that the mass media set agenda for public discussion which could influence decision taking. The study uses interview, existing records and Focus Group Discussion to gather the data. The findings show that community radio stations in Anglophone West African countries are owned and controlled by the community; the community radio in Anglophone West African countries is regulated along the broad guidelines that guide broadcasting in those countries; and community radio is used for various purposes with the central focus on development. The study recommends that Governments should encourage the operation of community radio by granting license to willing communities; avoid undue interference in the operation of the community radio; and big organizations and non-governmental organizations should support community radio financially and logistically and the Nigerian government should commence the licensing of community radio in the country.

Keywords: Community radio, community media, alternative media, community development, innovation diffusion

Background

Community radio is meant for the use of the community where it is located and operated. Howley (2005) explains that it is located in a defined community where it serves basically the interest of the community. According to Partridge (1982), the term, community radio was first coined by Rachel Powell in 1965 in a leaflet entitled *Possibilities for Local Radio*.

Community radio developed in order to provide for the specific need of a community. Diedong and Naaikuur (2012)³ explain that some community radio could broadcast in local language, pidgin language or the official national language. Community radio, unlike the conventional radio, is owned and operated by the community. Community radio is for the community and by the community. Community radio is fundamentally purposed to address developmental issues such as health, agriculture, innovation diffusion, family planning, and discharge of social and civic responsibilities.

Community radio helps to provide voice especially to the disadvantaged people. Its ownership and funding are rooted in the community (Mhagama, 2004, Rankovic, 2010). It also serves as the bridge builder between government and community members as well as catalyst for development in the community.

Statement of the Problem

Community radio is purposed to strengthen development in the community and to promote community values; however, some nations may not pay significant attention to the ownership and the

use of community radio. Dunu (2015) and Ale (2010) argue that if governments allow community radio, especially in the developing countries, development would come faster to the people and their communities and, by general implication, the entire country. There are issues with the way different countries grant ownership of community radio, how they regulate them and how both the operators and audience use community radio. It seems that countries that are liberal with broadcast ownership pattern and regulation have more people using community radio for developmental effort (Maina, 2013). There is also a lacuna in community radio ownership, control and use among the Francophone West African countries. The study therefore seeks to interrogate the pattern of community radio ownership, regulation and usage for development purpose in Anglo-phone West Africa

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the pattern of community radio ownership in Anglophone West African countries?
2. What is the pattern of community radio regulation in Anglophone West African countries?
3. What is the pattern of community radio usage for development in Anglophone West African countries?

Scope of the Study

The study covered the pattern of community radio ownership, regulation and usage in the English speaking West African countries of Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The Gambia could not be covered because of logistics. However, the four countries covered, out the five, are considered sufficient for generalization.

Literature Review

Community radio is owned and operated by the community where it is domiciled and the community it services. The philosophy and operation of community radio are different from those of commercial radio station (Sussman and Estes, 2005). They explained that community radio station could be established independently by the community or donated by individuals or groups. The control and day-to-day decision making are handled by the operators who are community members (Al-hassan, Andani and Abdul-Malik, 2011). The control and ownership reside in the community; thus, the people easily identify with the station. Such identification stimulates the growth and general acceptability of the station (Waters and Darby 2011, Chemwaina, 2014). The ownership structure of community radio resides in the community, even when the station is donated to the community or owned by an individual (Cammaerts, 2009, Van Vlaenderen, 2014, Olorunnisola, 2002, and Al-hassan, et al, 2011).

Light (2011) explains that the Uruguay government has given the full ownership, control and operation of community radio to communities. In Kenya, according to Maina (2013), it is community owned, controlled and operated. Community radio is a common phenomenon in USA, UK, Belgium, Canada, France and several other developed countries where community radio is community owned (Ó'Siochrú, Girard, Mahan, 2002, Cammaerts, 2009).

Everitt (2003) disclose that the operation of community radio in the United Kingdom is a fairly new phenomenon because community radio actually started in the country in 2002. The first set of 15 community radio stations that were licensed to operate were referred to as *Access Radio* and were community owned and autonomous.

Cammaerts (2009) notes that community radio throughout the world, especially in Latin America, is a veritable tool for community development. It is used for innovation diffusion, education and intra and inter-community harmony. Community radio targets the peculiar development interests and needs of the community such as broadcasting information on how the people could obtain soft loans for agriculture, small scale business and at times, scholarship and soft loans for education of the children (Barr 2009, Light 2006, Rennie, 2011, and Diedong and Naaikuur, 2012).

Kuttab (2012) cites the Arab countries where communities, especially the ones that are outside the metropolitan capitals of the Arab World, have been ignored by autocratic powers, but have been significantly assisted in the area of development through community radio. Maina (2013) found that community radio is a significant tool in prompting and promoting development among different communities in Kenya.

Diedong and Naaikuur (2012) found that community radio is used to promote issues of development in communities in Ghana. In Ghana, community radio serves as an agent of diffusion of

modern culture and helps in community modernization. Patil (2010) also found that community radio is used significantly for community development process in India, Nepal, Afghanistan, Thailand, the Philippines, Columbia, Bolivia, El Salvador, Burkina Faso, Haiti, Madagascar, Tanzania, and many African countries.

O'Brien (2011) explains that community radio helps to breakdown complex communication and innovation to the understanding and benefit of the local community. The community members believe and understand the content of the community radio; hence, it is easy to use community radio to mobilize people for developmental efforts.

Waisbord (2001), McKay (2009), Wabwire (2013) and Rennie (2011) observe separately that community radio serves as an agent of diffusion of modern cultures. Light (2011) explains that the regulation of community radio in Uruguay falls within the general standard of broadcast regulation in the country. There are no stringent or discriminatory regulatory standard set aside for community radio in Uruguay. For instance, until March, 2008, of the about 250 community radio stations that operated in Uruguay, none of them was licensed by the government. All of them operated freely without government license.

It was from 2008 that the government of Uruguay demanded that they should apply for operational license. However, the regulation of community radio is entrenched in the Constitution and government does not have any arbitrary power of regulation over the radio stations (Unidad Regulaadora de Servicios de Comunicaciones, 2009).

Cammaerts (2009) explains that in different Western countries such as the US, UK and Belgium, the regulation of community radio is handled just like the regulation of the other types of radio broadcasting systems. Community radio system is very vibrant in the US. It has a national body – National Federation of Community Broadcasters (NFCB) which was founded in 1975 and, according to Bekken (1998), was founded with the sole aim of resisting attacks on community radio stations by commercial and public broadcasters and any institutional interference.

Diedong and Naaikuur (2012) explain that community radio broadcasting exists in Ghana and some other West African countries. They add that the regulation of community radio in Ghana and many Western countries is within the law of the land and not done arbitrarily. Apart from conforming to the standards of the Ghana Communication Authority, the community radio stations have a strong independent body known as Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN) founded in 1999 by the first three community radio stations in Ghana: Ada, Progress and Peace radio stations. The GCRN guide the ethical and professional standards and operation of community radio in Ghana. They operate without government's interference.

Community radio is used for different purposes. For instance, Diedong and Naaikuur (2012) asserts that people use community radio effectively to share agricultural information to farming communities. Al-hassan et al (2011) found that community radio is used for agricultural advancement in Ghana. Atika (2013) also found that community radio is very useful in the fulfillment of farmers information needs in Indonesia. Madamombe (2005) discloses that community radio plays useful roles in health care and health education, farming, entertainment, information sharing and other developmental issues among communities in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.

Sterling and Huyer (2013) explains that community members in India use radio for entertainment, information sharing, education, healthcare matters, airing of grievances and general community development. Tucker (2013) points out that South African communities use them to share information on farming, mining, education, entertainment, cultural promotion and protection.

In USA, communities operate and use community radio for innovation diffusion, educational advancement, cultural preservation and promotion, entertainment, healthcare, hygiene and environmental protection and maintenance, social mobilization and inculcation of morality and spirituality (Gumucio, 2001, Promethues, 2013).

Women also use community radio effectively for self-education (Habermas, 1990; World Bank, 1994³⁸, Jallof, 1999, Feek, 2005, Dunu, 2015). Tucker (2013) discloses that a group of rural women in South Africa, in 1997, started a radio station known as Moutse Community Radio in Moutse Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. The radio was used to mobilize for the provision of potable and irrigation water and several other community needs.

The review shows that community radio is mainly community owned and operated. It also shows that community radio plays important role in the development of specific communities and, by implication, the entire country.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the theories of *Social Responsibility* and *Agenda Setting*. The Social Responsibility theory prescribes that the press should be allowed to operate without censorship but should be able to control itself within the framework of the universally recognized guidelines and laws. The theory postulates that the press should be open to the public and should be able to subject itself to public obligation and internal ethical and professional control. It recognizes that individuals should have access to ownership and operation of the press without interference from government. In this way the mass media would be available and accessible to the public and the mass media.

The Agenda Setting theory holds that the mass media set the agenda for public discussion and sometimes, the thought structure of the audience. The theory postulates that the mass agenda setting function could significantly determine what the public considers to be issues of importance. By hitting consistently on an issue the public discusses it and such discussion could significantly influence their attitude, decisions and actions. The theory assumes that the mass media create awareness thus making the audience to flow along the direction of the mass media discussion of issues. The theory thus assists in understanding pervasive and persuasive functions of the mass media in making the audience to engage in certain discussions, behaviours and actions.

Methodology

This study involved four Anglophone West African countries (Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone) and interrogated the pattern of community radio ownership, regulation and usage. Interviews, Focus Group Discussion and Extraction from Records were used to gather the data. The interviewees were Ms Akai Akusu Awuletey of Power FM, Monrovia, Liberia is Ghanaian resident in Liberia and Mr. Robert J. Clarke Jr of Star FM, Monrovia, Liberia. Both of them are major consultants to community radio stations in Liberia and Ghana. In 2009 the American Government awarded them separately the Fellowship of the American International Visitors' Leadership Programme (under the Edward Munroe Broadcast category) for their roles in the development and promotion of broadcasting in Liberia and Ghana. Mr. Ransford Raymond Kabia of Sierra Leone Television and Radio Broadcasting and Radio, Freetown, Sierra Leone and Mr. Samuel Rodney Valcarcel, News Coordinator of UN Radio, Freetown, Sierra Leone are senior consultants on community radio in Sierra Leone. In 2009 they won the Fellowship of the American International Visitors' Leadership Programme (under the Edward Munroe Broadcast category) for developing and promoting community radio in Sierra Leone. The four interviews were selected based on their in-depth knowledge of community broadcasting.

The qualitative data on the usage pattern of community radio were generated through Focused Group Discussions (FGD). Six different FGDs were conducted in Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Three groups were composed of eight members each who were active participants in listening to community radio and the other three groups were composed of eight workers in the community radio stations.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Availability of community radio in Anglophone West African countries

| Countries | Ghana | Liberia | Nigeria | Sierra Leone | Total |
|------------------------------------|-------|---------|---------|--------------|-------|
| Number of community radio stations | 70 | 67 | 00 | 31 | 168 |

Sources: Ghana Communications Authority (GCA), Liberia Telecommunication Authority (LTA), National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), Nigeria and National Telecommunication Commission of Sierra Leone (NATCOMSL)

The study found that community radio stations are in operation in Sierra Leone, Ghana and Liberia, but none existed in Nigeria. The result showed that there were a total of 168 community radio stations in the above four countries. The breakdown showed that Ghana had 70 (41.66%) community

radio stations, Liberia had 67 (39.88%), Nigeria had 00 (00%) and Sierra Leone had 31 (18.45%). The finding implies that Ghana had the highest number of community radio stations in Anglophone West Africa (41.66%) followed by Liberia (39.88%) and Sierra Leone (18.45%) while Nigeria had none (00%). The result is in tandem with the findings of Patil (2010), Diedong and Naaikuur (2012) and Kuttab (2012) that community radio exists in Anglo-Phone West African countries.

Table 2: Pattern of community radio ownership in English Anglophone West African countries

| Community radio ownership | Ghana | Liberia | Nigeria | Sierra Leone | Total |
|---|--------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Community owned | 29 | 35 | 00 | 12 | 76 |
| Donated to the community by individuals | 19 | 11 | 00 | 08 | 38 |
| Donated by government | 00 | 00 | 00 | 00 | 00 |
| Owned individually | 10 | 08 | 00 | 05 | 23 |
| Donated by non-government organizations | 12 | 13 | 00 | 06 | 31 |
| Total | 70 | 67 | 00 | 31 | 168 |

Table 2 shows that there were a total 76 community radio stations established by different communities in Anglophone West Africa, out of which Ghana had 29 (38.15%), Liberia – 35 (46.05), Nigeria –00 (00%) and Sierra Leone – 12 (15.78%). The breakdown of the 36 community radio stations donated by individuals is: Ghana – 19 (50%), Liberia – 11 (28.94%), Nigeria – 00 (00%) and Sierra Leone – 08 (21.05%). None of the community radio stations in the four countries was donated by government. A total of 23 community radio station stations were owned by private individuals out of which Ghana had 10 (43.47%), while in Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone 08 (34. %), 00 – (00%) and 05 (21.73%) were owned by individuals respectively. A total of 31 community radio stations were donated in by non-governmental organizations in the four countries under study. Out of them Ghana had 12 (39.70 %), Liberia – 13 (41.93%), Nigeria – 00 (00 %), and Sierra Leone - 06 (19.35%). The finding is line with those of Olorunnisola (2002), Everitt (2003), Sussman and Estes (2005), Cammaerts (2009), Waters and Darby (2011), Al-hassan, et al, 2011), Chemwaina (2014) and Van Vlaenderen (2014), which indicate that the establishment of community radio stations could come from different sources.

Table 3. The pattern of community radio regulation in Anglophone West African Countries

| Community radio regulation | Ghana | Liberia | Nigeria | Sierra Leone |
|--|--------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Registration by government | Yes | Yes | Not applicable | Yes |
| Regulated by government through an agency | Yes | Yes | Not applicable | Yes |
| Regulated directly by government | No | No | Not applicable | No |
| Internal regulation through ethical and professional standards | Yes | Yes | Not applicable | Yes |
| Government regulatory bodies | GCA | LTA | Not applicable | NTCSL |
| Internal ethical and professional regulatory bodies | GCRN | ALCR | Not applicable | Not applicable |

In Ghana, community radio broadcasting is regulated by the Ghana Communications Authority (GCA) which grants operational license to broadcast stations. The GCA monitors the quality of service and equipment standard, protects the interest of the audience and sets general guidelines for operation. Community radio stations in Ghana are also regulated by the internal ethical and professional standards of the Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN), an association of community radio stations in Ghana which helps with self regulation, promotion of professional protection of the interest and rights of members of the advancement of community radio broadcasting.

The Liberia Telecommunication Authority (LTA) regulates community radio broadcasting in Liberia. It grants broadcast licenses, establishes and maintains radio spectrum, monitors operations of

the broadcast stations and advises government on policies regarding broadcasting. However it does not interfere with the freedom and running of the community radio stations.

There is the Association of Liberian Community Radio (ALCR) comprising the different community radio stations. The association acts as a self-check to community radio stations in order for them to conform to ethical and professional standards as well as protect the interest of its members. Community radio broadcasting in Sierra Leone is regulated by the National Telecommunication Commission of Sierra Leone (NATCOMSL) which grants licenses to community radio stations and any other broadcast house in the country. It also regulates the broadcast industry for the protection of standards, ethics and the law. The body also protects consumers and operators. On regulation of community radio, Mr. Ransford Raymond Kabia said “the National Telecommunication Commission of Sierra Leone regulates the operation of community radio in Sierra Leone and the regulation is within the nation’s legal framework” Mr. Samuel Rodney Valcarcel also pointed that “there are no discriminatory regulations and laws against community radio in Sierra Leone. The community radio stations in the country operate freely without undue government interference”.

In Liberia, according to Mr. Robert J. Clarke Jr, “the operation of community is carried out by the Liberia Telecommunication Authority. Additionally, the operators of community radio stations also engage in self regulation through the Association of Liberian Community Radio”. According to Akai Akusu Awuletey “the regulation of community radio in Ghana is done through the Ghana Communications Authority, which regulates broadcasting in Ghana. There are also no discriminatory regulations against the community radio stations. The profession body of community radio, Ghana Community Radio Network, also plays significant role in the ethical and professional regulation of community radio”.

The finding suggests that the regulation of community radio in English Anglo-Phone West African countries is within the legal framework of the countries, which generally guide broadcasting. There are no discriminatory rules against community radio broadcasting, The finding agree with the views of Cammaerts (2009), Light (2011), Al-hassan et al (2011), Diedong and Naaikuur (2012), Waters and Darby (2011) and Chemwaina, (2014), which hold that most countries where community radio broadcasting exists the stations are regulated within the legal framework that guide radio broadcasting and that no discriminatory regulation and actions are targeted against them.

Pattern of community radio usage for development purposes in Anglophone West African Countries

The answer to this research question was generated through Focus Group Discussion and interviews The six different focus groups generally identified the main usage pattern of community radio for development purposes as discussed below: it gives voice to people who ordinarily would not have had voice in the mainstream media; the community benefits from the community radio by using it to get information about family method and how to benefit from new farming techniques; it is used to mobilize the community members to engage in profitable economic activities. It also helps them to gain access to micro finances such as loans for farming and setting up small businesses; community radio also helps the people to get tips on health, hygiene and environmental protection which makes them stay healthy and enable them go about their business. In the long run, development is attained because community radio helps to impact positively on the quality of life; since community radio is found to promote peace and harmony, community members could go about their businesses without fear and this helps in development; community radio helps the people to diffuse innovations in different areas which enable them to embrace developmental efforts; and in the area of education, community radio is found to have served great educational efforts and have helped to promote literacy and general education which are bedrocks of societal developments. It is used for community news, intra-community peace building; to receive farming instruction; community mobilization for communal efforts; inter-community peace building; promotion of gender issues; preservation of culture; and fight against bad socio-cultural practices such as female genital mutilation. It is used to mobilize the people for political participation; for education of the community; it serves as a voice for the community members; it is for commercials and other forms of personal paid announcements and public service announcements; for entertainment; information sharing; news and current affairs; skill acquisition; promotion of gender issues; participation in politics and political empowerment; and for environmental protection, family planning methods, to mobilize the community members to engage in

profitable economic activities. In this regard, community radio is found to play important function in community development in counties of study.

The four interviewees had common responses on the usage pattern of the community radio for development purposes in the Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone. According to Mr. Ransford Raymond Kabia “community radio is used in many ways in Sierra Leone, for instance the audience depends it on for news, entertainment, information on farming, health care, gender issues and information sharing. Mr. Samuel Rodney Valcarcel also shared similar views as he pointed out that “in Sierra Leone, the audience of community radio uses it for education, communal peace building and promotion of cultural heritage, self expression and family planning.

Mr. Robert J. Clarke Jr explained that the “audience of community radio in Liberia uses community radio in different ways which include economic activities, environmental protection, innovation diffusion and fight against bad practices. Similarly, Ms Akai Akusu Awuletey pointed that “in Ghana people use community radio for various purposes which are mainly education, voicing out of grievance against the authority, fighting negligence, promotion of health matters, economic activities, and participation in politics, participation in communal activities and entertainment and information sharing.

The finding is in agreement with findings of Habermas (1990), World Bank (1994), Jallof (1999)³⁹, Gumucio (2001), Madamombe (2005), Feek (2005), Barr (2009), Al-hassan et al (2011), Sterling and Huyer (2013), Promethues (2013) and Dunu (2015) that community radio is used mainly for community development efforts, entertainment, political participation, gender issues, agriculture, innovation diffusion, health matters, family planning and literacy issues.

Summary

Community radio exists in English West African speaking countries of Ghana, Sierra Leone and Liberia. In Nigeria, what exists is the campus radio system which is different from community radio system. The community radio systems in these countries are regulated within the confine of the laws and there is no discriminatory regulation against community radio system. Rather, what guides other broadcasting system is what guides them as well. The community radio stations in Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone are owned, controlled and manned by the community.

Conclusion

Community radio exists in Anglophone West African countries and it is owned and operates by the community in line with the universal philosophy of community radio. In these countries studied, community radio is used for development purposes in the community. Community radio could therefore be regarded as a tool for communal development in the studied Anglophone Western African countries.

Recommendations

1. Governments in Anglo-phone West African countries should encourage the operation of community radio stations since the community members use it for purposes that promote development in their communities.
2. The Nigerian government should commence the licensing of community radio so that communities could own and operate community radio stations.
3. Governments of the studied countries should make licensing of community radio stations less cumbersome.
4. Communities in the studied countries that do not have community radio stations should try to establish their own.

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