



# Radio for Women's Development

Examining the Relationship between Access and  
Impact

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Research shows that technology is a significant factor in a country's development and growth, especially as possessing, managing and using information through information and communication technologies (ICTs) becomes a more central aspect of modern societies (Melhem and Tandon, 2009). ICTs are also powerful tools for improving women's quality of life because they can be used by women to mobilize, acquire and exchange information and ultimately empower themselves (Beijing Declaration 1995, #35). Unfortunately, statistical evidence shows that in Africa, women's use of ICTs and participation in the knowledge society is very low. For instance, in Nigeria only 5.1 percent of households have a computer and only a tiny fraction use the Internet (Gillwald & Stork, 2009). In this context, radio has emerged as an accessible ICT, notably due to its portability, low cost, locally-relevant content, ability to run on alternative power sources (such as batteries and wind-up) and the low level of infrastructure required.

This case study describes a project funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) through the Radio, Convergence and Development in Africa (RCDA) program. The research project discussed here explored whether and in what ways the accessibility of radio has contributed to any tangible socio-economic changes in the lives of three distinct groups of Nigerian women within the State of Lagos: 1) University and polytechnic students, 2) Self-employed businesswomen, and 3) Stay-at-home wives and/or mothers. The research program asked:

- Are Nigerian women's lives being improved as a result of their use of and engagement with radio?
- Are Nigerian women applying the radio content in their daily lives? If yes, in what ways?
- How are Nigerian women accessing and engaging with radio – particularly using other technologies like mobile phones and the Internet?

The research found that all the women listened to radio at least one day a week,<sup>22</sup> with the majority listening every day. Most women listen to news and current affairs programs and public awareness messages. Some women reported problems with radio, which included lack of time, lack of interesting and relevant content, lack of reliable power supply, and no personal access.

### **Focus Groups**

Through focus group research conducted in Lagos, the research team was able to identify the programs women listen to most frequently and the reasons for their preferences. The following section high-

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<sup>22</sup> Frequency of listening: We measured the frequency by the number of days per week that the women listened to the radio. Each day could include any number of listening hours.

lights some of the trends found among the three groups identified as study participants.

### *1. The Students*

These women – who ranged in age from 18 to 35 – were undergraduate and postgraduate students of universities and polytechnics in the Lagos area.

#### **What They Were Listening to and Why**

Some 40 percent of the focus group listened to programs that explored women's role in society – particularly with respect to their career and nurturing a marriage. One of these programs on UNILAG FM (University of Lagos station) was targeted at university students and explored issues of concern to them such as careers. One student talked about a program called "Sharing Life Issues," a general interest call-in program on Inspiration FM, a Christian radio station:

I listen to Inspiration FM usually in the evenings. With Chaz B. They talk about so many issues, but most of the time, they talk about family. There was a particular one I was listening to about a lady and marriage. Some of them have some shaky marriages. And what a woman is supposed to do.

This show delved into diverse aspects of daily living, although its major focus appeared to be on family and marital issues.

Another student listened to a daily call-in program on WaZoBia FM, a pidgin-English station, hosted by an outspoken female presenter called Matse. Listeners would call in to contribute to the topic of the day.

The students said that their interest in these programs lay in the fact that, while not solely targeted at women, much of the programming was devoted to issues of interest to women, such as marriage, children, family, sexual harassment, and careers. Most of these programs invited listeners to call in and share their opinions on the topic of discussion. One student claimed: "There are so many tips you

can get from it (the radio show). They talk about children, family, work and it still centres on women.”

Students also disliked some things about female-targeted radio programs. Many students said that the programs were biased and fell short of any meaningful or in-depth analysis. For instance, one student talked about an episode of Matse’s program in which the presenter shared her experience growing up in a polygamous household. Her birth mother had abandoned her and left her to be raised by her father (who went on to marry more wives) and her father’s second wife. However, her stepmother brought her up as she would her own daughter.

So she (the presenter) ended up saying we should stop blaming men or women for polygamy. At times it could be good. If not for the second wife, the girl would not be educated. The way she ended the program was not so satisfactory to me. I was wondering, what was she trying to pass across to us? Is she encouraging us to be polygamous? Is she encouraging men to abandon their responsibilities?

Another student expressed similar dissatisfaction with how the subject of polygamy was handled by the presenter:

It would have been better if the program had centered on men and correcting the vices of the father ... really addressing the issue of the man. The presenter was biased based on her growing up and so was in support of polygamy.

Generally speaking, the students appreciated female-targeted programs, but criticized one-size-fits-all approaches and said they would like to see programs inspire debate and discussion rather than give didactic life lessons.

### **Convergence of Radio with New Technology**

Of the five students, only one used social media tools to engage with radio programs. She left comments on her favourite station’s page on the social networking site Facebook. She also shared the radio news items with her friends by posting them as her status update on

Facebook. She said she would have contributed more on Facebook but for limited access to the Internet.

One of the other students had phoned in to contribute to a program, while a third had sent in text messages. The use of newer technologies to participate in the programs had not occurred to them. While the students are by far the most technology-savvy members of our research sample, the focus group highlighted a lack of using these tools to participate in radio programs.

## *2. The Businesswomen*

The businesswomen ranged in age from 25 to 45 years and owned stalls in the market, selling a range of goods from food to household cleaning items. The businesswomen had up to a secondary (high school) level of formal education.

### **What They Were Listening to and Why**

The programs the businesswomen listened to were in Yoruba language and centred on shopping, relationships and the community. Popular programs among these women included one show on Radio Lagos presented by a couple posing as a husband and wife who discuss family-related topics, and *Oju Taye* (Eyes, See the world), a participatory program which gives citizens a platform to speak with and to bring their complaints to the notice of government officials. The businesswomen also like to listen to *Ekun Oro Aje*, which gives information on the prices of various goods in the market and where to get bargains, and to *Ado Onidodo*, which encourages listeners to keep their communities clean.

The programs the women cited as their favourites were ones that have direct and practical applications to their lives. One woman claimed:

The [*Ekú Oro Aje*] program is very useful to me and my friends because it helps to know what price of goods are in the market, as well as where to get things at reduced prices.

One woman explained how listening to *Oju Taye* directly impacted her daily life. She called in to the show to complain about the delay in the delivery to her neighbourhood of a transformer which was supposed to facilitate the distribution of electricity. Within a month of calling, the transformer was delivered and regular electricity supply resumed.

The women generally felt, however, that there are not enough programs that directly target women:

The programs present general issues that address everyone, though women can learn from this. There are no programs encouraging women in politics and business.

Despite this apparent gap, the businesswomen appeared satisfied with their choices.

### **Convergence of Radio with New Technology**

No one in this group used any form of new technology to contribute to or participate in a radio program; they did not have access to these tools and did not know how to use them.

### *3. The Stay-at-home Women*

The group was comprised of wives and/or mothers between the ages of 25 to 45 years who did not work outside the home. Most possess an undergraduate degree.

### **What They Were Listening to and Why**

The interviewed stay-at-home women preferred shows on health, as well as advice-based call-in shows. However, they feel that some programs targeting women are judgmental on particular issues:

For instance, on Inspiration FM, a guy called in and said he was homosexual and they said they would pray for him and God would deliver him from it. And I thought 'Maybe this guy doesn't want to be delivered from his homosexuality.' This is one of the reasons I don't listen to the station, because I felt... I guess they have a particular target audience, but I'm not their target audience.

This respondent said that the station would have more appeal if its programs were presented from a more balanced perspective.

### **Convergence of Radio with New Technology**

Only a small percentage of the women in this group use new technologies to participate in radio programs. Some sent text messages from their phone and left messages on the Facebook page of the programs they listened to. One of the women also follows her favourite radio presenters on Twitter. They typically use these tools to contribute to discussions on the programs that they like or to participate in quizzes and giveaways. The women who did not use any of these tools did not lack the skills to do so.

The stay-at-home women could only name one program that focused exclusively on women – a call-in program presented by two women who discuss a variety of topics targeted at women. However, Ms. P19 observed that the focus of the program is very limited: "I think ... 99.9% of that program is about marriage." She suggested that the program's focus be extended beyond the home and marriage to include other issues that affect women, such as politics and violence against women.

Two women in this group stated that having alternative radio devices would increase their listenership and participation in programs. For instance, Ms. P19 stated:

People can buy this torchlight for N500 (equivalent to \$3 USD) and it'll have a radio. It is more accessible to people than laptops and the Internet. You'll find all these Babas (petty traders) in their shops with their small lamp [listening to the radio].

## **Key Findings**

### **Radio is a key source of information**

Nearly half (47.8 percent) of the women interviewed (11 of the 23) said they felt they were better informed as a result of the programs they listened to. However – except for a few specific cases – it was not obvious whether the women made use of this information or applied it in any way to their lives. Nevertheless, the radio appears to be an important companion for many of the women spoken to. According to the women’s responses in the focus group interviews, the highest number of women report listening to programs which deal with societal events and provide social commentary (21.7 percent), followed by 13 percent who listen to programs about marriage.

### **Lack of women-targeted programming**

Of the 35 programs discussed in the interviews, these women identified only six programs that were targeted at women alone. The typical scenario is finding general interest programs that address women’s issues among myriad other topics.

The women indicated that they would be interested in women-targeted programs about technology, education, and career development.

### **How women use other ICTs to increase radio participation**

Very few of the women interviewed used Internet-based technologies to engage with radio and those who did were among the younger women. Three of the women aged 35 years and below (13 percent of the entire group) visit the Facebook page of their favourite radio programs, while one woman follows her favourite presenters on Twitter, one sends emails and one visits the station’s website.

The most commonly-used technology to engage with radio is the mobile phone: women will use it to call in to their favourite shows or send text messages. However, only a very small percentage of women interviewed even used this “new” ICT.



### **Which way forward for convergence?**

When asked about what alternative technology could increase their radio participation, one woman in the focus group said that regular Internet access would enable people to receive content online via streamed broadcasts and share the information within their respective networks. Another said that the availability of podcasts would mean that she could listen to the broadcasts at her convenience. However, these responses came from women under 35 years of age.

Three of the businesswomen indicated that they were not inclined towards using any Internet-based tools and instead preferred the use of other devices with built-in radios, like rechargeable lamps, torchlights and mobile phones. They felt that access to these types of portable radio devices, which were powered by batteries and thus not dependent on the availability of electricity, would increase their listenership, although they did not indicate if this would also increase their interaction with the programs.

## **Implications of Findings**

### *Need for greater diversity of women's programs*

The existing programs for women appear to largely reinforce traditional roles for women in society, choosing to focus on their roles in the home, and as wives and mothers. It is important that programs covering a wider range of topics, which represent a more complete picture of women's roles and interests, are developed for women.

### *Need for women to shape radio programming*

There is a greater need for women to be involved in shaping and presenting radio programs. It is particularly important that women from different backgrounds play a role in producing the content for the

programs, so as to better represent the variety of women's experiences, perspectives and interests.

*Convergence: Limits to increasing radio's accessibility*

Convergence between radio and new technologies like social media and other Internet-based tools appears to have limited effect in making radio content more accessible. The exception is among the younger generation of educated women, who were more likely than their older and less educated peers to have the interest and motivation to use these tools. However, it appears that – at least for the near future – mobile phones hold greater promise for increasing participation with radio programs. While it is possible to access the Internet on a mobile phone, this requires higher-end, expensive models, which are unaffordable for many.

## **Conclusions**

The women's responses indicate that they benefit from the content they access from radio programs, and this appears to be primarily through the information they receive. Our organisation, the Women's Technology Empowerment Centre, is providing information and communication training to women to enable them to use new technologies, not only to access and participate in radio discussions, but also to contribute to discourse on issues that affect their lives.

## **References**

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