

# Nokoko



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2013





**Nokoko**

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*Nokoko* is an open-access journal promoting dialogue, discourse and debate on Pan-Africanism, Africa, and Africana. *Nokoko* brings forward the foundational work of Professor Daniel Osabu-Kle and his colleagues when they started the Journal of Pan-African Wisdom in 2005. 'Nokoko' is a Ga word that means something that is new, novel, surprising and interesting. The journal offers a venue for scholarship to challenge enduring simplified views of Africa and the African diaspora, by providing other perspectives and insights that may be surprising, interesting, and refreshing.

Combining spaces for academic and community reflection, *Nokoko* creates an opportunity for discussion of research that reflects on the complicated nature of pan-African issues. It provides a forum for the publication of work from a cross disciplinary perspective that reflects scholarly endeavour, policy discussions, practitioners' reflections, and social activists' thinking concerning the continent and beyond. Hosted by the Institute of African Studies at Carleton University (in Ottawa, Canada), *Nokoko* provides a space for emerging and established scholars to publish their work on Africa and the African diaspora.

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This is a special issue of *Nokoko* with **Allan Thompson** as guest editor and **Heather Gilberts** as assistant editor.

Copyediting and proofreading by **Laketch Dirasse**, **Elizabeth Dwivedi**, **Sarah Gillis**,

**Wendy Lawrence**, **Kathryn McDonald**, **Blair Rutherford**, **Chris Webb**.

Layout by **Daniel Tubb**.





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## **Contributors**

**Allan Thompson** is an Associate Professor at Carleton University's School of Journalism and Communication. He joined the faculty at Carleton in 2003 after spending 17 years as a reporter with the Toronto Star, Canada's largest circulation daily newspaper. He worked for ten years as a correspondent for The Star on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, reporting on foreign affairs, defence and immigration issues and during that time reporting assignments took him to such places as Rwanda, Zaire, Sierra Leone and Kazakhstan. In early 2006 he launched the Rwanda Initiative, a five-year partnership between Carleton's journalism school and its counterpart in Rwanda. The project sent more than 175 Canadians to Rwanda as teachers, trainers and media interns and also brought Rwandan journalists to Canada to study. He also organized an international symposium at Carleton in 2004 on the role of the media in the Rwanda genocide and is the editor of a collection of papers called *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*. He has led various training programs for journalists in such places as Rwanda, Kenya and East Timor. He is also the co-

author of *The Canadian Reporter*, the standard journalism text for Canadian journalism students and the founding director of Carleton's Centre for Media and Transitional Societies (CMTS). Each year the CMTS sends about 20 Carleton journalism students to Africa on summer internships. The centre also just completed work on an IDRC-funded research program called *Radio, Convergence and Development in Africa*.

**Dr. Wallace Chuma** is Senior Lecturer, Centre for Film and Media Studies, University of Cape Town, South Africa. He is a former newspaper reporter and editor in Zimbabwe, and spent time on reporting fellowships in Botswana and the USA. Chuma received his PhD from the University of the Witwatersrand, and holds degrees in English and Communication from the University of Zimbabwe. His current research interests include media policy and regulation, media and power, new media and social change in Africa, and the political economy of African media.

**Edward Pauker** is Country Director for BBC Media Action in Burma/Myanmar. BBC Media Action is the BBC's international non-governmental organisation (NGO). It uses media to inform, connect and empower people around the world. Previously, Mr. Pauker managed research for all BBC Media Action projects across Asia, the Middle East and Europe. He also led BBC Media Action research projects on climate change and livelihoods in several countries in east Africa. Prior to joining Media Action he worked in the United States on anti-corruption issues and international affairs.

**David Musiime** is a Research Manager for BBC Media Action in Sierra Leone. Previously Mr. Musiime led BBC Media Action's research in Uganda with major projects focusing on climate change, livelihoods, governance and transitional justice issues.

**Naomi Ayot Oyaro** is the Programme Director for Raising The Village, a Canadian registered organization with operations in Uganda. She was formerly the Programme Director of Canada Africa Partnership on AIDS – Uganda. As lead consultant under Community Development and Health Consult, and on behalf of Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), Naomi recently undertook research on non-formal skills, employment and market opportunities in the Northern Uganda Districts of Kole, Oyam, Kitgum and Lamwo. Ms. Ayot has a Master’s degree in Management Studies (Project Planning and Management) from the Uganda Management Institute. She has a Postgraduate Diploma in Project Planning and Management from Uganda Management Institute and a BA (Honours) in Education with specialty in Economics and History from Makerere University Kampala. She also holds certificates in Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation from the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction and Life Skills and in Consequential Thinking Skills related to HIV/AIDS Prevention from Reach the Children.

**Farm Radio International** is a Canadian charity working with over 400 radio broadcasters in 38 African countries to fight poverty and food insecurity. It works with partner radio stations across Sub-Saharan Africa to plan and deliver special radio campaigns and programs that have a specific impact on a development challenge. Its resources for broadcasters, training approach, and participatory radio campaigns have been proven to increase farmers knowledge of improved farming practices, help them make decisions about whether to adopt the improvements, and realize the benefits of introducing these practices on their farms.

**Oreoluwa Somolu** is Executive Director of the Women's Technology Empowerment Centre (W.TEC) in Lagos, Nigeria. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics from Essex University, U.K., a Master's degree in Analysis, Design and Management of Information Systems from the London School of Economics, and a Certificate in Applied Sciences from Harvard University's Extension School. Her publications include "Networking for Success" (*i4d: Information for Development Online Journal*, 2009), "Telling Our Own Stories: African Women Blogging for Social Change" (*Gender & Development Journal*, 2006) and *Making the Most of On-line Learning: An Introduction to Learning on the Internet* (Education Development Center, 2004).

**Frances Fortune** is a practitioner in conflict transformation, with a special interest in media and mobilization of vulnerable groups. She has 25 years of experience in Africa, including 6 years as Search for Common Ground (SFCG) Africa Director, during which she helped establish and led SFCG peacebuilding strategies in 15 countries. In West Africa, she developed strong relationships with community radio stations, including launching unprecedented national networks. She is a civil society and gender activist and has published and spoken widely on citizen participation in reforms. Frances is currently a Senior Advisor for SFCG and is pursuing her PhD in Global Governance at the Balsillie School of International Affairs in Waterloo, Canada.

**Cindy Chungong** is a young professional with an interest in long-term transformation of conflict and post-conflict societies. She has worked in a range of countries in West and Central Africa on conflict management, human rights, elections observation, and social research. She is currently a Programme Associate with SFCG, providing support functions in programme development, monitoring, management and communication to 10 country programmes in West and Central Africa and the Sahel. She holds degrees from the UK (Cambridge University, King's College London) and France (Sciences Po, Paris).

**Kennedy Kubuga** is a PhD candidate and also lectures at the Tamale Polytechnic. With a keen interest in ICT and its implications for and applications to development work, he has worked with a number of international organisations and gained varied experience in research, solutions development and implementation, enterprise and teaching. He is currently the Technical Advisor and Country Representative of the International Institute for Communication and Development in Ghana, which focuses on the applications of ICTs in health and education. Kubuga also consults for the Christian Health Association of Ghana where he is overseeing the application of ICT projects in thirty-three health delivery and training facilities across the country. He founded and runs BoldTech ICT Solutions, which provides end-to-end ICT solutions to the public, and the BoldSteps Foundation, which carried out this research; he plays key roles in building rural capacity using ICTs.

**Elizabeth Demissie Dadi** is a lecturer at Jimma University, Ethiopia. She holds Master's degrees in journalism and communication as well as in African languages and applied linguistics. Alternative media and the nexuses between language and the media are her major research interests.

**Tokunbo Ojo** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Studies, York University, Toronto, Canada. His teaching and research interests are in global media studies, development communication, journalism studies, political communication and diaspora communication.

**Gado Alzouma** is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the School of Arts and Science, American University of Nigeria, Yola. He did his undergraduate and graduate studies in France. He holds a Ph.D. in Anthropology from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, USA. His research and publications focus on information and communication technologies for development, as well as globalization and identities. He is the author of many papers in internationally recognized academic publications, including: "Myths of Digital Technologies in Africa: Leapfrogging Development?" (*Global Media and Communication*, 1(3):339-56, 2005) and "Dimensions of the Mobile Divide in Niger" (in Muschert & Ragnedda (eds.), *The Digital Divide: The Internet and social inequality in international perspective*, 2012).

**Monica B. Chibita** is an Associate Professor and Head of Department of Mass Communication at the Uganda Christian University. She taught at Makerere University for 17 years where she also served as Associate Professor and Acting Head of Department. She co-edits the *Journal of African Media Studies* (JAMS) and sits on the editorial/advisory boards of several other refereed academic journals. She is a board member of the *New Vision*. Her research and publication have been in the areas of media and democracy with a focus on broadcast media regulation, indigenous language media and media curriculum and training.

**Dr. Wisdom Tettey** is Dean of the Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies and Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of British Columbia (UBC), Okanagan Campus. Tettey holds a Bachelor's degree (Honors) in Political Science and Russian and a Graduate Diploma in Communication Studies from the University of Ghana; a Master's degree in Political Science from UBC; and a PhD in Political Science from Queen's University. He was previously a Killam Resident Fellow at the University of Calgary (2004) and a Visiting Research Fellow at the Ghana Centre for Democratic Development (January-July, 2006). Tettey is an interdisciplinary academic with research expertise and interests in mass media, civic engagement and politics in Africa; the African Diaspora, representation, and transnational citizenship; political economy of globalization and information/communication technologies; brain drain, diaspora knowledge networks and higher education capacity building in Africa; and international and intercultural communication. He has published extensively in these areas. He has served as a consultant, advisor and policy analyst for various organizations including the World Bank, Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, International Association of Universities, the World Bank Institute, the United Nations Development Program and the Third World Academy.

**Nduka Otiono** is a Banting Postdoctoral Fellow, Institute of African Studies, Carleton University. He obtained his PhD from the University of Alberta and joined Carleton from Brown University where he held a one-year postdoctoral fellowship, worked closely with Chinua Achebe as Senior Research Assistant, and was appointed a Visiting Assistant Professor. A fellow of the William Joiner Centre for War and Social Consequences, University of Massachusetts, Boston, he has been a journalist, cultural activist, and General Secretary of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA). Besides scholarly papers and joint editorship of two anthologies, his publications include two books of poetry and a collection of short stories which won the ANA/Spectrum Prize for fiction.

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*Editorial Notes*

# **Exploring Radio, Convergence and Development in Africa<sup>1</sup>**

Allan Thompson

When it comes to media in Africa, radio is still king. But the dramatic increase in mobile phone penetration on the continent is ushering in a significant change in interpersonal communications and potentially a change in the conventional broadcast medium of radio.

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1 The Radio, Convergence and Development in Africa (RCDA) program was led by Professor Allan Thompson of Carleton University's School of Journalism and Communication, who worked closely with research mentors Dr. Mary Myers from the UK and Prof. Joshua Greenberg from Carleton as well as research associate Heather Gilberts, a doctoral candidate in Communication Studies at Carleton. David Smith of Okapi Consulting also provided advice on the project, in particular an assessment of the work of grant recipients. This introductory note to the guest-edited issue of Nokoko was compiled by Allan Thompson, drawing upon the contributions of other RCDA team members.

And yet, the penetration and democratization of the means of communication that has accompanied this growth has had a substantial but as yet largely under-researched effect. This convergence of different information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the domain of radio and development – be it through radio phone-in shows, listening groups or field interviews – is growing at a rapid pace.

Several years ago, officials from Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) met at a crossroads (London's Paddington Station to be precise) to discuss how best to devote more attention to the role of traditional radio in Africa as an important ICT. From that discussion grew an effort to examine the nexus between radio and other, newer ICTs and how they might be impacting upon development in Africa. Later, UK-based media consultant Mary Myers produced a concept paper,<sup>2</sup> setting out a strategy for a research program in the field.

In 2009, Carleton University's Centre for Media and Transitional Societies was selected to establish and administer the Radio, Convergence and Development in Africa (RCDA) research program. The CMTS put together a project team and then conducted a brainstorming roundtable in Butare, Rwanda to seek advice from experts on the research program design. A public call for statements of intent by researchers drew in more than 150 submissions. Of those, 50 applicants were invited to submit a full proposal. In the end, 16 research projects were selected for funding by the RCDA program, which produced a significant body of research by a network of nearly 30 researchers, most of them Africans, based in Africa. Over and above their formal research reports, together, their RCDA body of work comprises nearly 20 journal articles and book chapters, ten

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2 The concept paper by Dr. Myers can be found at: [http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/ICT4D/Radio\\_and\\_Development\\_in\\_Africa\\_concept\\_paper.pdf](http://r4d.dfid.gov.uk/PDF/Outputs/ICT4D/Radio_and_Development_in_Africa_concept_paper.pdf)

web publications and podcasts and a dozen conference presentations.

This special issue of *Nokoko* features a cross section of some of the work of the RCDA project, including two peer-reviewed articles by project researchers, four extensive case studies and one field note on preliminary research on so-called sidewalk radio. The issue is rounded out by a book review by Professor Tokunbo Ojo of York University, an edited transcript of a panel from the recent conference of the Canadian Association of African Studies on the subject of ICTs and convergence in Africa, and a personal tribute to Chinua Achebe, who is not only widely viewed as the “Father of African Literature” but also worked early in his career at the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. The Achebe tribute was submitted by Nduka Otiono, a former postdoctoral fellow and Senior Research Assistant to Professor Achebe and currently a Banting postdoctoral fellow at Carleton University’s Institute of African Studies.

The starting point for the research by the RCDA teams was the assumption that radio – especially when it is local, independent and participatory – can be a positive force for development. From there, the point was to ground-check the phenomenon of the convergence of traditional broadcast radio with newer ICTs – particularly mobile phones and the internet – and to ask ‘what does convergence mean on the ground.’ For the various research teams this meant different things: for some it meant looking at whether rural African women equipped with mobiles are better able to participate in the development process; for others it entailed looking at diaspora populations and the extent to which convergence affects their engagement in the politics and development of their home countries; for others still it entailed asking questions about the quality of radio production of a developmental nature when new ICT tools are used and whether or not radio stations are able to tell better stories with enhanced interactivity. These are just a few of the themes covered by the 16 teams.

From the findings of all these research projects several overall patterns emerged clearly. First, radio and other ICTs are indeed converging and merging at an ever-increasing rate, all over Africa – and beyond. Mobile phones, especially, are playing a critical role in the daily experiences of Africans today. Various teams found that most radio stations on the continent have embraced computers and digital editing to some degree and even the smallest rural stations in the poorest and more remote areas of, for example, Sierra Leone or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, now have talk-shows incorporating listeners' phone calls on a regular basis. Second, where radio stations have embraced new technologies there are signs that they are offering an enhanced service to their listeners that contributes directly to better outcomes in terms of health, livelihoods and other developmental challenges.

However, the convergence process is happening slowly and is still subject to the well-documented digital divide. For instance, in Burkina Faso and Benin only eight percent of radio stations stream their audio content on the internet. We can contrast that with the vastly better equipped country of South Africa, but even here, as a team led by Last Moyo of the University of Witwatersrand found, the old disparities governed by geography, income and gender still prevail and affect access to ICTs and, disproportionately, access to radio. The urban and commercial radio stations – normally the richer ones – are tending to embrace the internet and other convergent technologies much more than the poorer rural and community-type stations, which therefore reinforces the disparities of access for rural populations and minority language-users.

Clearly the potential for participatory radio programming is greatly enhanced by the spread of mobile phones. For instance, in Northern Ghana a third of the population sampled who had ever called in to a radio station claimed to have called in to ask a question or to seek new knowledge, which indicates the potential power of participatory radio for development. But, again, the research

teams show that cost is still a great obstacle for many – especially for women and for rural people.

In Northern Ghana one of the research teams found that barriers to participation were much more profound than just access: women and girls with low educational levels were much less likely to call in to a radio station than men and boys of a similar income and educational level, even though they said they had the means to do so. This points to serious gendered self-confidence issues.

Another ‘reality check’ is that convergence will not necessarily be the magic wand to increase audiences, because of significant problems related to standards of journalism. Looking at evidence from a study of the Great Lakes diaspora by researcher Nestor Nkurunziza, we can see that despite having relatively easy access to a range of radio stations from their home countries that have now become available via the web, Rwandans, Burundians and Congolese in Belgium and Canada still tend to turn to international broadcasters like RFI, BBC and VOA for news about their home region because these sources are deemed more reliable.

In Zimbabwe and South Africa, Last Moyo’s team also found that radio stations were unable to exploit the full potential of new media to enhance coverage of local news, not for want of the technological tools, but more often because they were understaffed and operated on shoe-string budgets. Furthermore, there is often a lack of institutional support within newsrooms for integration of new technologies in terms of newsgathering, such that innovative uses of new technologies by journalists are often limited to only a few isolated individuals.

Newer technologies such as mobile phones and Frontline SMS may be tools for involving more women in participating in or benefiting from radio programmes of an educational or developmental nature. But – as was found in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone – there are very few radio programmes offering attractive or relevant programming to women in the first place. Thus, the solution is clear-

ly not a technological one but a matter of old-fashioned gender-sensitive journalism training and incentives for broadcasters to address the information and educational needs of rural women and girls.

The RCDA research papers and case studies featured in this special issue of Nokoko touch on a cross section of the research themes explored by the RCDA program.

The work of Wallace Chuma, from the University of Cape Town, illustrates that the interplay of radio and mobile phones can even play life-saving roles. In his article, "The Role Of Radio and Mobile Phones in Conflict Situations: The Case of the 2008 Zimbabwe Elections and Xenophobic Attacks in Cape Town," Chuma looks at xenophobic and election-related violence in South Africa and Zimbabwe. Chuma sets out to examine the role of radio and ICTs in the context of violent and life-threatening situations and, additionally, to explore ways in which selected local radio stations, which covered the violent events, appropriated new ICTs to enhance their work. The methodology concentrated on qualitative interviews in Zimbabwe and Cape Town, South Africa, as well as archival and contemporary material. The findings show that mobile phones were by far the most used media in both countries during these violent events. Mobiles played a key role in keeping the victims and perpetrators informed. As regards radio, pirate stations were also important sources of information in Zimbabwe, but in South Africa it was found that local/community radio could be declining in influence. Chuma found that the majority of radio stations in both Zimbabwe and South Africa did not appropriate new media to the extent that they could have, at the time of the violent events in 2008.

In their article, "Getting on the Same Wavelength: Communicating Livelihoods Information and Innovation in Rural Uganda," David Musiime and Ed Pauker, from BBC Media Action, explore intersections between the needs and information sources of farmers, the role of radio, and the promise of new ICTs in relation to liveli-

hood programming in rural Uganda. The article summarizes research utilizing a mixed methodology of focus groups, interviews, and content analysis of radio programming and reports that there is a gap between the preferences of farmers when it comes to learning about livelihood issues and their current sources of information. It also notes that commercial media have done a generally poor job covering livelihood issues; this is due in part to commercial pressures, but also a lack of knowledge on the part of reporters and strained relations with policymakers and scientific experts. And despite the proliferation of mobile phone use, the vast majority of farmers (women in particular) do not use new ICTs to locate or share livelihoods information. The article points to the need for a more coordinated effort on the part of policymakers, NGOs and media organizations to produce information in a way that reflects the current needs and capacities of farmers.

Musiime and Pauker also demonstrate that the challenges facing farmers are vast and cannot be resolved by improved communication alone. Uganda, like much of Africa south of the Sahara, has the potential to produce food for its own use as well as a surplus for export. This is currently not the case in Uganda, nor is it in most countries below the Sahel. Any research aimed at improving food production is important. This study identifies key weaknesses which prevent Ugandan farmers from increasing their production. Perhaps the single greatest weakness is the inability of National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) to extend their services to those who need them most, namely rural women who do the bulk of agricultural work. To expect NAADS to improve its service delivery without external help is a recipe for failure. The researchers have clearly identified the strengths and weaknesses of each actor involved in the information chain which reaches farmers.

The case studies in this special issue are drawn from research conducted in Northern Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria and a regional study looking at Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea.

Naomi Ayot Oyaro and Farm Radio International document the work of a research team led by Henry Gidudu in Northern Uganda, which found that by adding automatic SMS texting to radio campaigns about HIV/AIDS prevention, more of the audience was prompted to come forward for counselling and testing than did as a result of the radio campaign alone. The research team involved a partnership between the African Farm Radio Research Initiative (AFRRI) and CAP-AIDS Uganda. The project was called *The Role of Radio and ICT on HIV/AIDS Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) - Seeking Behaviour in Atanga Sub-County, Pader District, Northern Uganda*. The study used a before-and-after design, using a participatory radio campaign to encourage local people to go for voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) for HIV/AIDS at local clinics. The AFRRI research was done in close cooperation with CAP-AIDS, Radio Mega FM, in Gulu, and local health services. The radio campaign was supplemented with SMS reminders and encouragements to take up VCT services. The results show that there was a significant increase in uptake of VCT services due to the radio campaign. When SMS texting was added to the campaign there was a further marked increase in the numbers of listeners availing themselves of VCT services. Among women, the introduction of SMS support to the radio campaign seemed to cause three times more women to come forward for VCT testing than the increase caused by radio only. This strongly suggests that when conventional radio is paired with a new ICT such as SMS texting (in this case Frontline SMS), the results can be very positive. Using controlled samples, this research has clearly demonstrated that a combination of SMS interaction between clinics, popular radio stations and the local community effectively increases the number of people going for testing while at the same time reducing occurrence and transmission of disease. Radio stations with the highest listenership in the region were chosen, and tested models of SMS delivery developed by Farm Radio International were



put into practice – in other words, there was no need to re-invent the wheel for research purposes.

Oreoluwa Somolu, of the Women's Technology and Empowerment Centre of Nigeria, submits a case study of her project "Radio for Women's Development: Examining the Relationship Between Access and Impact." The project utilized survey and focus group research to explore how radio and newer ICTs (mobile phones and social networking sites) are used by urban Nigerian women and their potential for enhancing development efforts. The case study shows that there is a dearth of programming devoted to women's issues, and that women would like to see more programs that take up issues directly relevant to their lives. Nevertheless, despite this limitation, radio remains dominant as a source of news, education and entertainment, and women regularly apply programme content in their daily lives. The case study also demonstrates that while some women use mobile phones to engage with radio content, very few are using Internet-based platforms such as social networking sites to respond and contribute to their favourite programmes. The findings are being used to develop recommendations for improving radio content in a way that speaks to the unique interests of women and as a way of increasing their engagement with and contributions to programme content.

Perhaps most interesting in Oreoluwa's study is her naming of the elephant in the room – radio *is* an ICT. These days, it is not just a receiver. Radio is also an alternative power source, it is a phone charger, it is a source of light and, when combined with mobile phone use, it becomes an instrument for two-way communication. Taking this a step further, the mobile phone increasingly incorporates a radio receiver within its software, making the mobile phone/radio instrument often the only piece of electronic communications equipment most people on the continent will ever own or even use. Closely linked to this is the finding that Facebook is increasingly being used by women to talk about programmes they

have heard on the radio and to comment on the radio programme's Facebook page.

Such interaction has, according to Oreoluwa's research, produced positive results in the community. For example, frustrated with the lack of electricity in a certain part of Lagos, women called a radio station to complain, and shortly afterwards a transformer was delivered. This is a simple example of convergence leading to improved quality of life. Although Lagos has a healthy and competitive radio environment, programme content is still targeted largely at men. Oreoluwa's research found that women, understanding the power of technology, would appreciate more content that would improve their lot in life, notably ICT instruction programmes, career development, education and business. She concludes that radio is one of the most important sources of information for women, as well as being a companion.

Frances Fortune and Cindy Chungong, from Search for Common Ground, provide a case study from their research in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia focused on Frontline SMS and community radio. They explore whether recent improvements in radio broadcast coverage and SMS technology increase women's access to information and provide them with a platform that adequately meets their needs. Some 300 women were surveyed in each of six sites in three countries, two radio stations each in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The study finds high rates of regular listening among women and also high levels of mobile phone access or ownership. There is a strong correlation between education and higher social class and participation in radio programmes through calls or texts. The study finds that Frontline SMS has the potential to improve listener interaction but the project did not have enough time to prove this conclusively. The choice of countries is interesting and pertinent – three fragile economies located in post-conflict societies. Although more often than not the bread winners, and carrying out the bulk of manual labour, women in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea are relegated

by men to positions of secondary importance. Fortune and Chungong set out to discover why women are not participating more in community radio and how new technology might be able to change this. Notably, they found that most women are not participating in radio programmes for a myriad of reasons. The research suggests that increased texting between radio stations and listeners would provide more money to phone companies, hence providing leverage for consumers to demand lower tariffs.

Kennedy Kubuga led a team of researchers from the BoldSteps Foundation in Northern Uganda and submits a case study: "Radio and Mobile Telephony - The Gender Factor." Kubuga and his team used focus groups, questionnaires and interviews in their study. Focus groups were conducted with 76 women who belong to development associations. Kubuga concluded that because rural women entrepreneurs are often left out of questionnaires, focus group discussions were ideal for collecting their views. The study examined more than 500 completed questionnaires and also relied on seven interviews with radio station managers and disc jockeys.

Kubuga made a remarkable effort to attain gender balance – no simple feat on a continent where women are often relegated to second class citizen status, even in countries where equality is guaranteed in the constitution. Perhaps most importantly, Kubuga's research quantified several beliefs concerning rural radio that are generally only supported by anecdotal evidence:

- Radio tends to be more important and have a greater impact in rural areas;
- Level of education is directly linked to participation in radio programmes (with the use of cell phones) – participation rises with rise in education level;
- It is clear that where local radio operates, there tends to be less conflict;

- Women are undoubtedly listening to programming, but, apart from the education factor, also limit their participation due to the cost of calls.

The opening up of the airwaves in Ghana has been one of the most important contributing factors to participation and interest in local programming. Kubuga concluded that while rural women have an almost equal access to radio as urban dwellers, they contribute less content to radio. On the receiving side, urban dwellers depend less on radio for education and news. The implication is that, with radio's power to influence policy, urban dwellers are much more likely to influence policy and indeed content of radio. This is subtly relegating rural dwellers to the position of second-hand users of information.

A field notes section looks at some of the preliminary findings of Ethiopian researcher Elizabeth Demissie Dadiin a study called "Radio Trottoir and Political Communication in Ethiopia."

Demissie examines the role of 'sidewalk radio' in the Ethiopian public sphere. In particular, drawing on participant observation at sporting events, in cafes and pubs, and in cultural houses (*Azemari bet*), she examines how citizens share gossip, jokes, poems and other forms of "secret" communication as a way of discussing, debating and, frequently, mocking the political establishment in Ethiopia. She also examines how new ICTs, such as mobile phones and Bluetooth, are used in the transmission of old-fashioned *radio trottoir*, or sidewalk radio. The preliminary findings raise important questions about how citizens communicate in repressive countries where traditional media such as radio is widely understood to be a tool of government propaganda.

Ethiopia is a society where official voices other than the state are not tolerated. Finding any means to influence public opinion is a difficult and dangerous challenge. Demissie's research clearly indicates that Ethiopians are desperate for credible information and come up with creative ways to pass on sensitive information, espe-

cially in the form of jokes. Follow-up research could look at how examples of radio and convergence in other countries facing similar information challenges might be applied to Ethiopia. Zimbabwe's fledgling pirate radio services might be a good starting point.

The RCDA engaged Okapi Consulting, in the person of David Smith, to interact with the members of the RCDA research network and to assess their work. Smith, who is an expert on radio and media development in his own right, was tasked with helping to gauge the contribution of the RCDA project toward building a research network and also to assess the capacity-building impact, particularly for the individual researchers. He interviewed virtually all of the grant recipients, and after reviewing their findings, came to this illuminating conclusion about the importance of regarding old-fashioned radio as an ICT:

Radio has, to a large extent, dropped off the radar of most of the traditional Northern funders. What they have forgotten or failed to recognise is *that radio is the original ICT in Africa, and the cell phone is its most recent add-on ICT* [emphasis in original]. Radio, convergence and development in Africa is, or at least it should be, how the cell phone is empowering people by allowing them to engage with the number one electronic purveyor of information and entertainment on the continent. To a large extent, most other ICTs are funneled through the cell phone, which is increasingly becoming the platform for everything – internet surfing, social networks, email, SMSs, video, photos and, of course, voice. As oral culture predominates in most of Africa, radio and the cell phone are simply extensions of the human voice; they are the electronic post office that functions while the traditional post office barely exists.

The overarching conclusion of the RCDA team was that convergence between traditional radio broadcasting and new technologies is certainly a reality in Africa and, in many places its potentials are beginning to be realised. But the benefits in terms of development gains are yet to be clearly and conclusively demonstrated.

That sentiment was echoed by three renowned African researchers who took part in a panel during the May 2013 conference of the Canadian Association of African Studies, hosted by Carleton

University in Ottawa. Gado Alzouma (American University of Nigeria), Monica Chibita (Uganda Christian University) and Wisdom Tettey (University of British Columbia) reflected on convergence and particularly the impact of mobile phones during a panel discussion entitled "Africa Communicating: Digital Technologies, Representation, and Power." All three acknowledge the impact of convergence, but contend that its import may not yet be fully understood. An edited transcript of their presentations rounds out this special issue of Nokoko, underlining the point that there is still much to learn about the impact of convergence on development in Africa.



# **The Role of Radio and Mobile Phones in Conflict Situations**

The Case of the 2008 Zimbabwe Elections and  
Xenophobic Attacks in Cape Town

Wallace Chuma, University of Cape Town

This article considers the role that radio and new information and communication technologies (ICTs), in particular mobile phones, played in the lives of citizens caught up in violent conflicts in Zimbabwe and South Africa in 2008. With reference to the violence-prone general elections in Zimbabwe (March- June 2008) and the xenophobic attacks in South Africa (May-July 2008) – both of which led to the loss of life – this paper explores the ways in which citizens appropriated the media to receive and generate information so necessary in the context of life-threatening conflicts and also how radio in particular appropriated new media to enhance its coverage of the conflicts. The research was informed primarily by the need to get a closer understanding of the role of radio and mobiles in the experiences of ordinary citizens and, further, the need to explore the ways in which ‘new’ media is being appropriated by the ‘old’ media to enhance both news-making and participatory cultures among audiences. The article, which is based primarily on extensive interviews, and document and content analysis, argues that, in both cases under study, mobile phones were the most critical sources of information for victims of violence, while community radio seems to have become marginal in the lives of citizens, especially in South Africa, who relied more on national radio and television, in addition to the mobiles. The appropriation of new information technologies by radio stations in both contexts was, in these circumstances, fairly substantial, especially in Zimbabwe where ‘pirate’ radio journalists in Zimbabwe applied ‘guerrilla-style’ tactics to generate and file copy in a hostile political context.

**Keywords:** Radio, ICT, Zimbabwe, Cape Town, conflict, xenophobia

## Background to the study

Between March and June 2008, two violent events that are the focus of this paper unfolded in Zimbabwe and South Africa, both resulting in loss of life and forcing mass displacement. The first was the March 2008 'harmonised' general election in Zimbabwe, which was preceded by profound levels of violence, most of which was state-orchestrated as the ruling Zanu-PF party struggled to retain its hold on power. The March election did not produce an outright winner for president, prompting a run-off in June that same year, during which the violence escalated further. According to Human Rights Watch (2012), nearly 200 people were killed in the violence, while 36,000 were displaced.<sup>3</sup> The second violent event happened in South Africa, where black South Africans targeted foreign Africans living in the country, in a wave of both sporadic and highly coordinated attacks that lasted just over a month. The attacks claimed the lives of 62 people and displaced an estimated 35,000 (*Mail & Guardian*, 31 May 2008).<sup>4</sup>

In both cases, the violence was both lived and mediated. Within the broader public spheres in both countries, the televised, often harrowing images of violent death and destruction made for hotly contested readings and interpretations. However, within the private spheres of ordinary citizens caught up in the violence, the appropriation of the media was tied to the need to survive (or the compulsion to inflict pain on the 'other', in the case of the perpetrators).

Radio and new information and communication technologies (ICTs) – especially mobile phones – are by far the most pervasive media available to most Africans today. Although the area of radio and ICTs for development in Africa has attracted a growing body of research (see DeBruijn, Nyamnjoh, and Brinkman, 2009; Bosch,

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3 See: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/03/08/zimbabwe--no--justice--rampant--killings--torture>. Accessed 23 July 2012.

4 See: "Toll from xenophobic attacks rises." <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2008-05-31-toll-from-xenophobic-attacks-rises>). Accessed 10 September 2013.



2011; Gunner, Ligaga and Moyo, 2012), there has not been adequate research attention on the uses of radio and ICTs in conflict situations, or the appropriation of the convergence capabilities of new media to enhance reporting by traditional media such as radio. This makes the present case studies on Zimbabwe and South Africa all the more interesting.

### *Scope and Objectives of the Research*

The main focus of the research was to explore how victims of repression and violence appropriated radio and new media in conflict situations, as well as how radio stations themselves appropriated new media for purposes of enhancing their coverage of life-threatening situations in the two countries. With regard to individuals, a purposive sampling procedure was used in both cases to identify the interviewees, who were subjected to in-depth interviews. Six radio stations were initially selected for research, and these included Cape Town-based community radio stations (Bush Radio, Radio Tygerberg and Radio Zibonele), as well as three 'pirate' radio stations that broadcast into Zimbabwe via shortwave and the Internet. These included Radio Voice of the People (VOP; based in South Africa), SW Radio (based in the UK) and Voice of America (VOA, Studio Seven; based in Washington). During the research process, however, Radio Zibonele could not be included because management representatives at the station were not available to be interviewed.

The study sought to, *inter alia*, explore the uses of ICTs by the selected radio stations and the different ways in which men and women access and participate in the use of these technologies, within the communities under study. The research also sought to establish the linkages, if any, between the use of radio and mobiles.

The general objective was therefore to begin to explore the roles that both old and new media play in changing African communities, especially in the ways in which citizens negotiate their day-to-day

struggles, and particularly in conflict situations. Beyond the comparative analysis of the case studies, the overarching aim was ultimately to contribute to the body of knowledge on how radio and ICTs could be used in disaster mitigation and conflict resolution in the African context.

With regard to radio stations, the study sought to elicit information on how they framed the 2008 conflicts in both cases, whether and the extent to which they appropriated ICTs (such as the Internet, social media platforms and mobile phones) to enhance their reporting of the conflict, and also to document the lessons learnt from the experience of covering the two events. The interviews with ordinary citizens in both Zimbabwe and South Africa were aimed at establishing the roles that the mobile phone in particular and ICTs in general played in their lives during the conflicts, and the role of community and 'pirate' radio as their sources of information during that period. The study also sought to establish whether there were variations in the uses of radio and ICTs among citizens in both cases, based on variables such as gender and age. Based on collected data, the study ultimately also sought to identify the constraints and opportunities in the use of radio and ICTs by Africans in conflict situations. This is important for, among other things, future policy making.

#### *Literature Review and Conceptual Framework*

The role of radio and new media in Africa has attracted considerable scholarly attention, especially following the introduction of multiparty politics on the continent in the early 1990s. Among other things, researchers have been interested in understanding the role of both radio and new media in promoting democracy and development (see Ronning, 1995; Nyamnjuh, 2005). Even the role of radio in conflict situations has also attracted some attention, especially in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, where sections of the

media, including radio and newspapers, gave editorial support to the conflict (Gourevitch, 1998; Thompson, 2007).

The articulation of the role of the media in both democracy and development is in many instances informed by Jurgen Habermas's notion of the public sphere (see Bosch, 2011). The public sphere concept generally relates to a media system that provides accessible space for the articulation of 'rational-critical' discussion and debate by the citizenry. Such debate and discussion is considered an essential ingredient of both democracy and development. Habermas used the concept in his seminal inquiry into the rise and decline of a bourgeois participatory democracy centred on critical-rational debate. He defined the public sphere as

the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatised but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason (1992:27).

Coffee shops, salons and other public places were the sites for this debate, whose participants gradually constituted a countervailing force to the authoritarian state of early modern Europe. The bourgeois public sphere offered space in which citizens had access to deliberate about their common affairs and articulate broader social interests, and hence became an institutionalised arena of discursive interaction. Although the concept has been criticised for, among other things, assuming the existence of a universal and all-inclusive public sphere (and therefore being ahistorical), it continues to be used as an analytic category to measure the extent to which the media act as platforms for public participation. In relation to the role of radio in African societies, the concept remains useful, not least because radio is the de facto mass medium in Africa, given its pervasiveness.

In addition to conceptualising the role of the media in relation to the public sphere, the media are also considered to perform other roles including being watchdogs to power, being sources of information, education and entertainment, voices of the voiceless, and so forth. These roles are most commonly assumed in liberal-pluralist approaches to the media (see Curran, 2005).

The above articulations of the role of the media in society, though very important, locate that role within 'normal' or peaceful situations. Given the nature of this study, it is important to also reflect on debate on the role of the media—both old and new—in the context of conflict situations. Probably the most cited reference in this regard is the work of Norwegian scholar Johan Galtung on the subject of what is commonly known as 'war' and 'peace' journalism. Galtung has been highly critical of dominant media representations of conflicts that glamourise war, focus on the dualism of victory and defeat, and are biased in favour of 'official' sources. He advanced the model of "peace journalism," the key components of which included the following: peace-orientation, i.e., humanizing all sides and placing emphasis on the destructive effects of violence and the importance of achieving peace; exploring untruths on both sides; and focusing on solutions rather than victory or defeat (Galtung, 1998). Although the model attracted its fair share of criticism for conceptual and practical weaknesses – such as lack of clarity on the methodology of peace journalism – (see, for example, Shinar, 2009), it remains useful in helping explore the role of media in conflict situations in Africa.

With respect to the appropriation of media (including new media) by citizens caught up in conflict, this study is also informed by the currently thin body of research on the subject in Africa and elsewhere. As Eytan Gilboa (2009) observes, despite the critical significance of the roles played by new media in conflict and conflict resolution, this area "has been relatively ignored, neglected by both scholars and practitioners" (p. 88). The paucity of research and anal-

ysis in this area, he argues, “may be attributed to the difficulties inherent in multidisciplinary research and the absence of adequate tools, models, and frameworks for analysis” (p.89). In his articulation of a framework for analysing the role of media in conflict resolution, Gilboa points to the critical role that the Internet and mobile phone play both in conflict situations and in conflict resolution.

In his exploration of the uses of mobile phones in post-conflict Liberia, Michael L. Best (2011), noted: “In Liberia people cling to their mobile phones as tools for security and safety. They use phones to combat crime, sexual violence, and to help in medical emergencies” (p. 25). Besides being lifestyle tools, mobile phones in conflict or insecure situations in Africa were also lifeline instruments, argues Best. In March 2012, the Liberian police, with the support of the private sector in that country, gave free mobile phones to a group of women in the small town of Weala – one of the most affected by the civil war and where violence against women continued to be rampant – with the instruction to use them to alert the police (via a toll-free number) when any type of security problem was brewing, including domestic violence and other types of violence against women and girls in the area. As a result of this intervention, instances of domestic violence dropped significantly.<sup>5</sup> In light of the foregoing, it is important to note that with the proliferation of new information and communication technologies, some of the roles associated with traditional, institutionalised media are no longer just their preserve.

The Internet, for example, offers a panoply of communicative possibilities which dwarf the mostly linear and time-and-space-bound features of traditional media. Mobile telephony, which is the second area of focus of this paper, continues to attract significant research attention because of its phenomenal growth in Africa and elsewhere, as well as its increasing embeddedness to both old and

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5 See UN report: “From conflict resolution to prevention: connecting Peace Huts to the police in Liberia.” (<http://www.unwomen.org/2012/09/from-conflict-resolution-to-prevention-connecting-peace-hut-to-the-police-in-liberia/>)

new communication technologies. In sub-Saharan Africa, mobile phones have grown so rapidly that between 2000 and 2008, access to them grew from 1 in 50 Africans to over 60 percent (De Bruijn, Nyamnjoh & Brinkman, 2009). In South Africa, access to mobile phones is now well over 80 percent, and is growing.

In many parts of Africa, as Aker and Mbiti (2010: 208) note, mobile phones “have represented the first modern telecommunication infrastructure of any kind” given that the fixed telephone service never went as far as the most remote parts of the continent. The rapid increase in mobile phone coverage has been possible thanks to massive investment in the industry by both local and multinational players, sometimes against considerable odds in the early days. Although the costs of access, both in terms of the mobile phone device and airtime vary from country to country, the past decade has generally seen a lowering of costs across the board, resulting in greater uptake. The fact that there is a huge market for used mobile phones as well as cheap imitation models imported from China makes it far easier to acquire a working phone in Africa. So rapid has the growth in mobile phones been in Africa that some scholars have referred to them as ‘the new talking drums of Africa’, in reference to the traditional African drum which was the key communicative tool in mostly pre-colonial Africa (see De Bruijn, Nyamnjoh & Brinkman, 2009).

Although research on mobile phones has covered a range of areas such as access, costs, policies among others, this article is interested mostly in research that explores the ways in which citizens and marginalised communities appropriate new media (including mobile phones) for self-expression and for subverting power, especially in authoritarian political contexts. Moyo (2010), for example, explores the manner in which Zimbabwean citizens in the Diaspora appropriated new media – blogs, news websites and ‘pirate radio’ – to counter state propaganda churned out via the mainstream state-controlled media. The political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe, which began in earnest in 2000, resulted in the closure of democrat-

ic space for many citizens who did not support the ruling party, Zanu-PF (see, Raftopoulos and Savage, 2005; Campbell, 2003; Nyarota, 2006). The closure of privately-owned newspapers by the state made hundreds of journalists and other media workers jobless, and many of them left the country. From their bases in the Diaspora, some of the citizens started online news websites, weblogs and 'pirate radio' stations which provided alternative and oppositional narratives of the crisis, countering the state's version of events. These developments attracted and continue to attract scholarly attention (see Mano and Willems, 2008; Chuma, 2008, 2010).

The use of new media to subvert power has not been confined to Zimbabweans in the Diaspora. Within Zimbabwe itself, citizens engaged with mobile phones and illegal 'pirate radio' to communicate amongst themselves and with the outside world as violence and electoral fraud took centre stage during the 2008 elections (Chuma, 2008; Moyo, 2010). Short message services (SMS) were shared amongst voters – especially opposition voters – with information ranging from safe voting sites to preliminary results for different constituencies. During the xenophobic attacks in Cape Town, foreign nationals also used SMS to warn each other of violent hotspots. Victims also called in on talk show radio programmes to relate their ordeals.

It is clear from the foregoing that citizens appropriate new media to suit their particular circumstances, and any credible approach to the study of usage should take this into account. This article assumes as its point of entry the critical view that the appropriation of technologies, both old and new, takes place in a wider socio-economic and political context which shapes it, even as technology shapes the same social milieu (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003). In both cases under study, the usage of both radio and mobile phones during conflict is considered not just as a one-off phenomenon, but as one shaped by broader political, economic and social circumstances in the two contexts.

## **Methodology**

Given the nature of the inquiry at hand, this study applied a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, though with a strong qualitative/interpretive bias. An analysis of 'uses' or 'appropriations' of media by citizens lends itself to more than just figures and quantifiable highlights of instances of use. It requires an examination of the contexts in which such use is occurring, including both personal and social contexts.

As highlighted earlier in this article, the principal method used in the research in both cases was in-depth interviewing. Structured interviews were held in Cape Town and Harare between August and November 2010, and involved victims of xenophobic attacks in South Africa and election-related violence in Zimbabwe. Although a random sampling procedure was applied, for convenience purposes the research team selected sites where most violence took place in the two contexts. In Cape Town, interviews were held in the 'townships' where most of the violence occurred in 2008, namely Khayelitsha, Langa and Du Noon. In Zimbabwe, given that the violence was a national phenomenon, and was largely targeted at opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and other civil society activists, the researchers chose Harare and Masvingo as sites of interviews and arranged most of the contacts through the MDC and civil society groups. The interviews comprised both open and closed-ended questions, including brief biographical details of the respondents (such as age and gender), their location in 2008, how they were affected by the event in question, their patterns of use of radio and mobiles, etc. Fifty interviews were held in each of the two case studies, for a total of one hundred. The research teams in both cases were subject to initial training that included ethical guidelines in researching human subjects.

In addition to interviews with individuals, the research team also interviewed editorial staff at selected radio stations which were involved in programming during the conflicts in both cases. The in-



interviews sought to establish how these stations framed the conflicts as well as the extent to which they appropriated new media such as the Internet and mobile phones to enhance their coverage of the events.

Document analysis also formed a lesser part of the methodology in this study. The close scrutiny of relevant documents on radio, mobiles and other new media was aimed at establishing the background historical, contextual as well as theoretical framework for the study. Additionally, the scrutiny of both critical and popular literature on both the elections in Zimbabwe and xenophobic attacks in Cape Town was meant to provide context to the study. Document analysis was therefore critical in order to inform the type and scope of questions raised in the interviews as well as the general thrust of the intellectual inquiry as a whole.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### *The central role of the mobile phone in the context of crisis*

A key finding of this study was the centrality of the mobile phone in the lives of the interviewees in both cases, with mobiles being by far the most used source of information by victims of violence and conflict. Nearly all the interviewees (99 percent) in South Africa stated they possessed a mobile phone during the time of the conflicts in 2008 and relied on it for key information, while 80 percent in Zimbabwe confirmed the same. Although in both cases the use of phones was largely confined to making or receiving calls, as well as sending and receiving text messages, the mobile phone played a key role in keeping the victims of violence abreast of the situation around them in a context where access to information could mean life or death.

It emerged from the interviews – especially in Cape Town – that the mobile phone also occupied a key space in the day-to-day social

lives of citizens before and after the crisis. It served multiple functions in their pursuit of pleasure and recognition in general, and specific functions during emergencies such as during the xenophobic attacks. Although the majority of respondents admitted to having owned rather basic phones in 2008, by the time of the interviews in 2010 they had moved on to smart, Internet-enabled phones which allowed them to spend significant amounts of their time on social networking sites, especially on Facebook. The convenience the mobile phone provided had become so naturalised that the majority of the respondents found it difficult to imagine the world before the device was introduced.

However, during the xenophobic attacks in Cape Town, the mobile phone was a key 'must-have' for the victims. A typical victim was aged between 25 and 30, male or female, who had arrived in South Africa within the last two years (from 2008), a holder of a Diploma or University degree from Zimbabwe, and worked contract jobs as labourer or waiter/waitress in Cape Town. Although the extent of victimhood varied from being threatened to being injured and displaced, a common feature among all the respondents was their reliance on their phones for information: warnings on violent hotspots, directions to municipal halls or 'protection centres' that the City of Cape Town made available to accommodate the displaced immigrants, updates on whether the situation in the townships had calmed enough for them to return, and, perhaps most important, updating family and friends both in Zimbabwe and overseas on their situation. In a number of instances, the victims received financial support from family members in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and the United States to help them resume their disrupted lives after the attacks ceased. The mobile phone was the most convenient tool for these transactions.

The use of mobile phones was somehow less pervasive in Zimbabwe (80 percent of respondents) during the 2008 elections. This was partly because the country was in the middle of a severe eco-

conomic crisis at the time and mobile phones were still fairly expensive gadgets for many people. The critical shortage of SIM cards at the time also meant that even those with handsets could not get connected. Further, it emerged from the interviews that the generally bad network coverage by the three service providers in the country (Econet, Telecel and CellOne) resulted in limited access to mobile communication. However, among the respondents who made regular use of the phone – especially Harare residents – it was an extremely important resource in the context of horrific state-sponsored violence against members of the opposition. They used the phone to communicate with family and friends and warn each other of violent hotspots, communicated with their political parties and civil society groups to report on attacks, and probably most importantly, opposition election agents filed election results from the local voting sites to the national vote-counting centres as a way of preventing rigged results. In some cases the local opposition agents took photos of the final results and uploaded them on the Internet, constantly updating citizens within and out of Zimbabwe who were keenly following the elections.

Another interesting aspect of the usage of mobile phones in Zimbabwe was the circulation of viral SMS messages among mostly opposition voters who subscribed to the activist civil society portal called kubatana.net. ([www.kubatana.net](http://www.kubatana.net)). According to its founder Beverly Clarke, the portal sent out a total of 78 text messages to a list of subscribers between 25th March and 4th August 2008. This period covered both the harmonised elections in March and the presidential election re-run in June. According to Clarke, the list of subscribers grew phenomenally from 1040 in March to 4200 by August, largely because of the popularity and relevance of the messages they sent out. She wrote:

The list of subscribers almost doubled in the two weeks following the 29th March election, and then doubled again in the months between the harmonised election and the presidential election run off. This growth was

largely due to word of mouth—one person receiving our SMS updates, sharing them with a friend or colleague, and this person contacting us to subscribe as well... information in these text messages included reminders to go and vote, clarification about the voting process, House of Assembly and Senate results, inspiration, hope, requests for feedback, announcements of events, offers to share relevant information by post and email, and suggestions for citizen activism.<sup>6</sup>

A sample of the messages sent out shows a variety of interesting details relevant to the election. For example, on the morning of the election, on 29th March, the following SMS was sent out: "Kubatana! Some poll stations asking foreign born for renunciation certificates. This is NOT a requirement, Call Zim Lawyers to assist-091278995/04251468." This was a very critical message because Zimbabwean law does not allow dual citizenship and authorities could easily stop especially foreign born Whites (suspected by the government to be opposition supporters) from voting on the pretext of not presenting a certificate renouncing their foreign citizenship. The Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, a non-profit body, offered free legal services to anybody victimised by the state during the elections. Other messages provided basic information about where to vote, the contact details of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission encouraging citizens to phone them to complain about the delays in results, and updates on both local and global news reports.

Finally, with regard to the usage of mobile phones in both cases, it emerged that gender was, albeit in a small way, a factor in how citizens appropriated mobile phones in the context of conflict. From the interviews, it emerged that most of the men had access to and made use of mobile phones, while some women did not get to use such phones (only 20 percent of women in Zimbabwe had phones in 2008) and therefore had to rely on radio or word of mouth. For those with handsets, especially in Cape Town, they used them mainly to send "Please Call Me" messages because they did not have air-

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6 Personal communication with Beverly Clarke, 8th September, 2010.

time. This is an important finding which reflects the connection between gendered structural inequalities in general and access to communication.

*The role of community radio*

Another interesting finding was that local/community radio could be declining in influence in contexts of high media density such as South Africa, where they have to compete with numerous other sources of information. This is a critical departure from the highly acclaimed role that community media and alternative media played as nodes of 'independent' critique and information during the Apartheid era.

The majority of respondents (80 percent) in Cape Town said they did not rely on local radio stations for information on the violence. While one could argue that this naturally makes sense given the nature of the conflict and the fact that many of the respondents were in constant movement as they sought refuge, this argument becomes difficult to sustain if one considers that most of the respondents said they actually relied on TV, national or commercial radio and mobile phones. The TV and national radio provided a global/national picture of the violence, while mobile phones were sources of more intimate information such as updates from and to family and friends affected by the violence. The most popular radio stations cited in Cape Town were national stations SAFM and Metro FM.

However, the fact that the majority of xenophobic attack victims did not rely on community radio for news does not take away the fact that these radio stations covered the violence. Both Bush and Tygerberg radio stations deployed journalists to cover the attacks, and relied on the police, non-governmental organisations, local authorities and the accounts by victims for their stories. They also received tip-offs and updates from members of the public via SMS and

phone calls. For Bush radio, the coverage was two-fold: news bulletins giving updates on latest developments, as well as its daily talk show 'Saki Sizwe' (Building the Nation). During the attacks, the show regularly hosted a guest from the Refugee Forum, a non-profit organisation that offered assistance to victims of the violence. According to station manager Adrian Louw, the majority of callers on the talk show expressed outrage at the ongoing attacks and in some cases offered valuable information such as the location of temporary housing facilities made available by the City of Cape Town for the victims. Although the talk shows were generally themed around what was happening at the time, there were also sessions that focused on the role that Africans outside South Africa played in support of the anti-Apartheid struggle. According to Louw:

At Bush radio we also put emphasis on our history. When we were in exile during the Apartheid days, when we went to Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia and many other African countries, which embraced us with open hands. So we did vox pops with the general public. We wanted to know why South Africans were turning up against the very people who had helped them in their darkest days (Interview, 29 April 2011).

Besides treating the attacks as xenophobic, Bush radio also highlighted what Louw refers to as "economic gangsterism" as a motive for the violence in its news bulletins. This was particularly true of attacks on Somali shopkeepers, who operated shops in the 'townships' and offered competitive bargains which their local South African rivals failed to match.

The picture was significantly different in Zimbabwe, where the state still held monopoly over the airwaves during the period under review. The Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) radio and TV stations churned out propaganda news items in support of the Zanu-PF party, therefore leaving supporters of the opposition with little option but to revert to so-called 'pirate' radio stations and mobile phones. The most popular sources of information among the

respondents were radio VOA and Radio VOP, both of which broadcast on short wave from outside Zimbabwe.

All the three 'pirate stations' provided comprehensive, though largely pro-opposition coverage of the elections, from the pre-election campaigns, the voting process, the violence and the results. An interesting feature of the coverage by these radio stations is that they employed a vast network of stringers across the country including the most remote parts, and these journalists filed copy using their mobile phones. All three stations had provisions whereby a stringer with a story but no airtime would simply send a text message to a toll-free number and the station would call back and allow him or her to file the story by phone. Members of the public who witnessed violent activities or other potential story ideas also had access to toll-free numbers, and radio stations would assign a stringer closest to the scene to follow up the story. According to Gerry Jackson, station manager for SW Radio Africa, her station had the following in place during its coverage of the elections:

We had a mobile phone in Zimbabwe where listeners could leave a text or voice message with their contact details. This information was then emailed to us and we would call the listeners back to take part in an open forum. Twitter was not applicable to the Zimbabwe (2008) poll at that time due to the lack of broadband. We sent news headlines into Zimbabwe three times a week to 30,000 (mobile phone) subscribers to this free service. Our website carried all breaking news around the election and was a vital resource for those interested in the Zimbabwe situation at the time. We had a key role in exposing the violence. We named and shamed perpetrators via SMS and our website and SW broadcasts (Interview, 6 November 2010).

The use of 'pirate' radios was, however, fraught with real danger. In the run up to the elections, some non-profit organisations distributed free radio short wave radio sets to mostly rural-based citizens to allow them access to alternative information. However, following its loss during the March 29<sup>th</sup> election, Zanu-PF went on a violent confiscation spree, seizing these radio sets, forcing citizens to either hand them over or pretend not to have them and continue to tune in

to pirate radio stations in secret, mainly in the forests away from home.<sup>7</sup>

*Radio and the appropriation of new media*

Both community radio stations in South Africa and 'pirate' radio stations in the Zimbabwe case study exploited the potential of new media to enhance coverage of the two violent situations in a fairly substantial way. This is especially so if we consider that this was in the era before popular social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. In South Africa, interviews with radio personnel at Bush Radio and Radio Tygerberg showed that in addition to deploying journalists to the theatres of violence, they also benefitted from phone-ins and SMS updates from members of the public for their coverage of the violence. Both stations did not do live streaming at the time and did not have feedback facilities on their websites, and attribute this mainly to their limited budgets. Station managers at both stations also conceded that they did not make deliberate or special allocation of resources towards the xenophobic attack stories per se, not least because of budgetary constraints. The attacks were therefore covered just like any other criminal activities in the country. Both Bush and Tygerberg radio stations also argued that since national radio and television were giving extensive coverage to the attacks, it was futile to compete with them. Viewed against the backdrop of the highly limited use of community radio as a source of information in Cape Town by the victims, this becomes interesting in the sense that it somehow negates the normative role of community media, which are supposed to constitute local public spheres for citizens sharing the same geography or interests.

In Zimbabwe, the 'pirate' radio stations adopted a call-back approach (mentioned above) which enabled members of the public with stories to contact the station, which would call them back on

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7 Interviews in Masvingo, November 2010.



their mobiles for more details, or deploy their stringers closest to the theatre of action to give coverage. The stations' websites were also regularly updated, while live streaming was possible but largely for Zimbabweans in the Diaspora. Radio VOP was particularly strong when it came to updating its website and taking up feedback from readers/listeners who contacted the station to report on events unfolding in their communities, especially cases of state-orchestrated violence.<sup>8</sup> In fact, it can be argued that 'pirate' radio stations in Zimbabwe generally practised both professional and citizen forms of journalism in the coverage of the 2008 elections.

There was a correlation between innovative appropriation of new media and popularity of radio stations. In other words, those radio stations that fully exploited the convergence capabilities of new media were cited by most of the respondents as their primary sources of information during the violent events. This was so particularly in Zimbabwe during the 2008 elections.

### *Concluding discussion*

The findings of this article – which is part of a larger study on media convergence and development in Africa – are important for one's understanding of the role of Africa's most pervasive mediums and communication tools. Although this particular article focused on the uses of radio and mobiles in the context of violent and life-threatening situations, the findings can arguably apply to 'normal', everyday situations as well. They point to the critical role that mobiles play in the daily experiences of Africans today and how that role is certain to increase as the costs of access become lower and broadband for mobiles becomes more common. They also provide important insight into the role that 'pirate' radio can play as a key source of independent information in a context of an authoritarian political establishment which prohibits free media.

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8 Interview with John Masuku, Executive Director, Radio VOP, August 2010.

The findings also suggest a number of other things. First, that radio and mobile phones remain critical avenues through which Africans send and receive information. This is important because, for policy and practical purposes, the issue of access to these vital sources of information is necessary for active citizenship. Policymakers, especially in restricted media environments such as Zimbabwe, will need to understand that the existence of legislation curtailing free expression and limiting media ownership may negate, but will certainly not stop citizens finding alternative and creative ways of accessing and generating information. In Africa, it is important therefore to create information and media policy regimes that facilitate increased citizen access to radio and mobiles (as well as the Internet). As the study revealed, these media can play critical, even life-saving roles in the context of violence.

Second, the study shows that appropriating new media by radio stations can enhance their newsgathering processes while promoting participatory cultures and practices among listeners and audiences. The period covered by this study is five years ago, and since then a lot has happened in terms of the proliferation of new media and social media platforms. Radio stations have naturally adapted to this, albeit in varying degrees. It is important that radio stations in Africa be adept at appropriating new media to help tell their stories better as well as to attract and retain audiences. This is important not only for their roles in society, but also for their very survival. African audiences increasingly have access to a range of news sources and therefore have increased choices. Should radio stations fail to adapt to these changes, they risk being irrelevant.

Third, there is a link between gender (and class) and access to both radio and mobiles. It emerged from the study that men had more access to and exploited more facilities on the mobiles, while women had scant access to mobiles, which they largely used to send 'call back' messages. What was not clear and perhaps needs further research is whether having limited access to the full exploitation of

the facilities of the mobile phone made women more vulnerable to the violence in this particular case. The gender dynamic in the use of media is an important finding for policymakers. Addressing gender imbalances in society is important for a range of reasons, including the creation of equitable access to media and promotion of active citizenship.

Fourth, the findings suggest that the traditional conceptualisation of community radio as the natural local public sphere may no longer hold true as new forms of mediated socialisation emerge, especially around the mobile phone. The increasing number of Africans owning mobile phones and using them for a variety of things means that the mobile phone is perhaps the mass medium of the future on the continent. This is because phones are no longer just used for making and receiving calls. The introduction of broadband 3G in Zimbabwe in 2010, for example, saw a significant number of users using mobiles for social networking, banking and to access the Internet. In South Africa, the recent drop in broadband prices augurs well for mobile phone users. During interviews, respondents argued that should there be a repeat of the events of 2008 in both Zimbabwe and South Africa, they would be able to exploit the multiple facilities of their mobiles even more to access and send out information relating to their situations, hence mitigating their vulnerability. Although radio, including community radio and other traditional media continue to be vital sources of information and journalism that citizens require to make informed decisions, the Internet-enhanced mobile phone allows users to access all this information on a click and further, allows users to network with the outside world beyond the institutionalised gatekeeping of traditional media.

This study set out to establish the role and uses of radio and mobiles in conflict situations in two African countries, less as a detailed comparative endeavour than an exploration of two cases as a way of identifying and documenting the lessons that can be learned. What emerges is a picture of the centrality of both old and new me-

dia in the generation and reception of critical information in the lives of citizens caught up in conflict.

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# Getting on the Same Wavelength

## Convergence and the Communication of Livelihoods Information in Rural Uganda

Ed Pauker and David Musiime<sup>9</sup>

*BBC Media Action, Research & Learning Group*

Drawing on the concept of innovation systems and the role of media in agricultural development, this paper explores the intersections between the needs and information sources of farmers, the role of radio, and the promise of new information communication technologies (ICTs) in relation to livelihoods issues in rural Uganda. Utilising focus groups, in-depth interviews, and content analysis of radio programming, the research evidences a gap between farmers' preferred sources of livelihood information and where they actually get information from. It finds that radio programming does not effectively cover livelihood issues. A number of reasons for this are identified, including: media practitioners' limited knowledge of the subject matter, their minimal engagement with farmers' preferred information sources, strained relations between policy-makers and livelihoods researchers, and commercial pressures. Our findings

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suggest that despite the proliferation of mobile telephony, most farmers do not use new ICTs to access or share livelihoods information. The study points to the need for a more coordinated effort on the part of government, civil society, livelihoods researchers, agricultural extension agents and the media to improve how livelihoods information is communicated. It also demonstrates that the challenges facing farmers are vast and cannot be resolved by the media or ICTs alone.

—“Technology and the village are two hard things.”

Anette Bogere, AppLab Uganda, Grameen Foundation

As mobile telephony proliferates across sub-Saharan Africa, the opportunities offered by media and information communication technologies (ICTs) as means of providing livelihoods information to rural Africans have yet to be fully realised. In June 2010, BBC Media Action’s Research & Learning Group, funded by the Radio Convergence and Development in Africa (RCDA) program and supported by Carleton University’s Centre for Media and Transitional Societies, conducted *Getting on the Same Wavelength*, a research project that examined the role media and ICTs play in the communication of livelihoods information in rural Uganda.

*Getting on the Same Wavelength* seeks to answer three main questions:

- How have media and ICTs been used to communicate livelihoods information to audiences in Africa?
- Where do media and ICTs fit within the livelihoods communication landscape in rural Uganda?
- How can the media and ICTs be used to impact the livelihoods of audiences in developing countries?

The first of these questions is examined through a review of the available literature.

### **Rural Radio in Africa: From Independence to ICTs**

Despite rapid urbanization, most Africans still make their living off the land, removed from the broadcast media centres and broadband



connections of Africa's capital cities (*World Urbanization Prospects*, 2012). While development and communications experts continue to point to the growth of new technologies and their potential to deliver information to rural citizens, radio remains the dominant medium of communication for most Africans (Myers, 2008). One of the reasons for this, Myers (2008) states, is that radio has long been recognised for its ability to reach poor and more marginalised communities and to allow for consumption of its content at the same time as the user participates in other activities.

Rural radio broadcasting in Africa developed in the 1950s in tandem with independence movements (Girard, 2003; Ilboudo, 2003). The content of such broadcasts included information relating to health, agriculture and wealth creation (Girard, 2003; Ilboudo, 2003). Radio programming for rural livelihoods developed differently in different countries, and has long been connected to promoting economic development (Eicher, 1999). Rural radio is also somewhat of an anomaly in the communication field; its differentiator is its geographic basis. As Chapman et al. state, presumptions of rural isolation and information poverty are often understood as "providing a *raison d'être* for a radio intervention" (2003: 1). To date, the model for rural radio in Africa has been decidedly paternalistic (Manyozo, 2008). Content was often pre-packaged and produced without consulting the communities to which it was broadcast (Manyozo, 2008). It tended to be produced in the capital city and broadcast to the countryside (Girard, 2003). Most of the time, programming came from the government itself, and was often produced by a radio station operated out of Ministries of Agriculture or by the state broadcaster (Girard, 2003; Ilboudo, 2003)

The initial shift away from a top-down approach to rural radio came with the advent of listening clubs (Girard, 2003; Ilboudo, 2003). According to Ilboudo (2003), in the late 1960s various state-based initiatives, particularly in West Africa, recognised the importance of collective listening and engagement with rural radio con-

tent. This mirrored the development of rural radio in North America, where in the 1940s, radio forums were developed to promote the discussion and implementation of development information (Manyozo, 2008). These forums were demand driven and enabled farmers to shape the content of programming and to decide what actions to take (Manyozo, 2008). The promulgation of these forums reflected a growing realization that improving information uptake required radio content to be mediated and contextualised by the target audiences. Despite these changes, the impact of rural radio programming was marginal because content production continued to be largely centralised and the concerns of local audiences not sufficiently addressed (Ilbuodo 2003).

The next stage of development of rural radio came with the loosening of developing countries' broadcasting regulations (Girard, 2003; Ilbuodo & Castello, 2003). Such changes also marked the beginning of the international community's push to promote agricultural development in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Stephenson, 2003). Chapman (2003) explains that this shift in legal regimes was often preceded by democratization and a general relinquishment of state control of the airwaves. The result was that radio frequencies were opened up to commercial actors, religious organizations and other civil society groups. These changes also led to the international community becoming more involved in the production of rural radio content. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, which began a strategic engagement on behalf of the development community to support rural radio in the 1970s, was a leading player in this regard (Girard, 2003; Ilbuodo & Castello, 2003).

The shift also coincided with the tenets of agricultural extension theory starting to drive and shape the content of rural radio programming. Early approaches drew heavily on Rogers' diffusion of innovation model, with extension workers and national agricultural research systems seen as creators and providers of knowledge, and farmers as adopters (Rogers, 1962; Hall et. al, 2010; Ballantyne,

2009) This approach reached its peak with the Training and Visit methodology, popularised by the World Bank from the 1970s to 1990s (Aker, 2011). Yet as the production of content shifted from national governments to development experts and researchers, the paternalistic nature of its production and flow of information remained (Swanson, 1997).

Since then, approaches to agricultural extension have become more participatory and localised (Anandajayasekeram, et al., 2008). A key element of this change was the realization by development practitioners, researchers and agricultural extension workers that a top-down approach to providing rural livelihoods information through radio, or otherwise, was ineffective. In its place various community-driven approaches have emerged that draw on systems theory, and which recognise that the livelihoods information landscape is shaped by multiple actors through a variety of communication channels (Castello & Braun, 2006; Hall, 2007). In these approaches, information transfer and innovation are viewed as an evolutionary and interactive process involving a flow of knowledge among many different actors (Hall, 2006). It is the relationships between actors, their social setting and the nature and intensity of their interactions that are seen to be the primary determinants of the innovation process (Ballantyne, 2009). Within this system, communication helps diffuse knowledge, build networks, support social learning and improve the governance of livelihoods policies and interventions (Leeuwis, 2010).

More recently, rural radio has been transformed by the growth of ICTs. Mobile phones, in particular, have transformed radio into a more 'horizontal' medium (Myers, 2008). The influence that the fast-developing ICT sector has had on the livelihoods information landscape goes beyond its convergence with traditional broadcast media. It has opened up another platform for communication, and the desire to re-imagine the ways in which livelihoods information is communicated. Efforts to categorise such new ICT-based interven-

tions can be broken down into four categories: voice information delivery services; radio: dial up and regular broadcasting; extension services on mobiles and database monitoring; e-learning and video based approaches (Gakuru, 2009).

Heeks (2009) characterises the use of ICTs and particularly mobile phones as dependant on 'passive diffusion' because they rely on market-based approaches and an active pursuit of value on behalf of consumers. This means that like other initiatives aimed at improving rural livelihoods, the structures and mechanisms used to transfer such information can breed inequalities (Duncombe, 2012). To date, the lesson to be learned from recent interventions have been poorly documented. One exception to this is the African Farm Radio Research Initiative, which provides insights regarding the use of ICTs in radio-based interventions across several countries (Sullivan, 2011). While it is often claimed that bringing ICTs into a more coordinated process of information and knowledge building is more effective, evidence of how such an approach would work when scaled up is still very much lacking (Duncombe, 2012). *Getting on the Same Wavelength* attempts to add to this evidence base by understanding how mass media and ICTs fit within the information ecosystem of rural Uganda.

## **Methodology**

The *Getting on the Same Wavelength* project drew on the innovation systems model as a basis for its methodology and analysis. It comprised a mix of both qualitative and quantitative research, including:

- 16 focus groups with farmers;
- 27 in-depth interviews with opinion formers; and
- Content analysis of one month of livelihoods programming from four rural radio stations.

The research began by conducting informal consultations with experts working on livelihoods issues in Uganda (see Appendix 1). The

objective of these meetings was to understand the major livelihoods issues affecting Ugandans and the role of the media and ICTs in communication about such issues. The information gathered from these consultations informed research design and implementation. Focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted in the capital, Kampala, and four rural regions. Regions were selected to provide a geographic spread across the country and include a number of different livelihoods groups. Each region also included a rural radio station known to broadcast livelihoods programming. The following four stations were selected based on their broadcast area and their willingness to participate in the study:

- Open Gate FM – based in Mbale District, Eastern Uganda
- Unity FM – based in Lira District, Northern Uganda
- Radio Pacis – based in Arua District, West Nile
- Kagadi-Kibaale Community Radio – based in Kibaale District, Western Uganda

#### *Focus group discussions*

A total of 16 focus groups were conducted in local languages<sup>10</sup> across rural Uganda (two male and two female groups in each region). Each focus group was comprised of approximately 10 participants, all of whom engaged in farming and a variety of other rural livelihood activities (such as livestock keeping and various small business activities). Each participant also listened to a variety of programming on the radio. Groups were split by age – 18-30, and 31 and higher – to facilitate conversation between group members.

#### *Opinion former interviews*

To understand where media and ICTs fit within the livelihoods communication landscape in rural Uganda, research was conducted

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<sup>10</sup> Translators were used where moderators were unable to speak local languages.

with each of the major groups thought to take a leading role in shaping livelihoods communication. Twenty-seven in-depth interviews were conducted with opinion formers representing the following:

- Government policymakers (3)
- Civil society representatives (3)
- Livelihoods researchers (4)
- Extension workers (4)
- Local government officials (4)
- Heads of farming associations (2)
- Media practitioners (7)

Despite efforts to have balanced gender representation, the majority of opinion formers interviewed were male. A list of all opinion formers interviewed can be found in Appendix 2.

#### *Media content analysis*

In addition to interviews and discussions with rural citizens and opinion formers, a content analysis was conducted of one month of livelihoods programming from each of the four participating rural radio stations. To collect such data, each station was asked to provide a month's worth of their leading livelihoods programmes.

The selected programmes analysed were broadcast between 1 October and 1 November 2010 and recorded by station staff. Each programme was transcribed verbatim and translated into English. A content analysis of the transcripts was conducted by hand using a standardised code frame that was piloted on programme transcripts before usage. Representatives from the African Farm Radio Research Initiative and the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications provided feedback on the construction of the code frame.

### *Research Limitations*

The focus of this research on the role of media and ICTs came at the expense of understanding the intricacies of other actors' roles. The role of the local private sector and regional actors, in particular, should be explored further. Efficiencies in research design also meant that focus groups were conducted in areas known to have radio stations broadcasting livelihoods information and that the views of farmers living in areas where rural radio may have had less of an influence were not gathered. In addition, despite efforts to have balanced gender representation throughout the research, the majority of opinion formers interviewed were male. Finally, some fieldwork was conducted preceding the national elections, which may have affected the views of participants.

## **Research Findings**

The discussion in this section sets out the insights gathered from farmers, other opinion formers, and media practitioners. It concludes with a presentation of the findings emerging from the media content analysis.

### *Farmers*

Farmers across Uganda raise crops and livestock for their own subsistence and commercial purposes. Their efforts are confounded by a number of problems, particularly pests and diseases, changing weather patterns and a lack of stable markets for commercial products. The farmers who participated in this study expressed a desire and need for more information about each of these issues.

There are a variety of governmental ministries and non-governmental organisations working on livelihoods issues across the country. However, the participant farmers reported that local government officials are an important source of livelihoods information

and there was relatively little discussion among farmers or local government officials about inter-community exchanges. The government's National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) is the most visible to Uganda's farmers. The farmers reported that NAADS extension workers are one of their main face-to-face sources for livelihoods information, and expect programmes run by the government, such as NAADS, to provide information, and inputs, to them. Yet despite this desire for support and the visibility of NAADS, most farmers claimed that they did not actively engage with the service, or have contact with NAADS workers on a regular basis. In the words of one older female farmer, "They just introduce it to you and leave you on your own."

Those who were involved with NAADS said it supported them through trainings, community sensitisations, and the provision of agricultural inputs such as seeds and tools. They also acknowledged that NAADS benefits relatively few farmers given the imbalance between the number of NAADS workers and the many farmers who need support. Others claimed that while NAADS provides them with seeds for new crops, it fails to provide pesticides or resources to protect them. The result is that the innovations and inputs provided by extension workers often fail to take hold among the farmers actively engaged with the service, or more widely.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are the other main source for farmers of face-to-face livelihoods information. CSOs usually engage farmers through seminars and in-field trainings. Some farmers reported, however, that CSO training is not sufficiently practical.

Most farmers are not in close contact with livelihoods researchers. When they are, it is usually linked to fieldwork by researchers. The farmers in the sample reported that they did not have difficulty communicating with researchers, in part because the researchers are usually accompanied by translators who can communicate in local languages. They also pointed out that researchers rarely communicated the results of their work directly to farmers.



Although local businesses were not included in the research design, the participant farmers noted that these entities play an important, though not necessarily positive, role in providing them with livelihoods information. Farmers require information about agricultural inputs, particularly pesticides. However, according to some farmers, individuals selling such inputs in their communities often are ill-equipped or uninterested in informing farmers about their products. Nonetheless, farmers often find themselves having to rely on the advice provided by these individuals.

Farmers exchange livelihoods information with their fellow farmers. Female farmers in particular emphasised the value of oral communication, noting that information is passed down orally through the generations, with older people in the communities teaching younger ones how to manage their crops and livestock.

Along with NAADS, CSOs and their fellow farmers, the radio is the other major source of livelihoods information for farmers. The participant farmers reported having greater access to radio than any other media and pointed out that local radio stations are an important and trusted source of information about their crops and livestock. They also viewed radio as a means for providing feedback to the government about livelihoods issues. Yet the farmers also reported that radio stations need to do a better job of informing their listeners about when livelihoods shows are broadcast.

There was also a sense among the participant farmers that the livelihoods information transmitted via radio is not sufficiently comprehensive. Many claimed that while weather reports and descriptions of pests and diseases are useful, they often have difficulty implementing what they hear. Some female farmers reported being too busy to listen to the radio. It was not clear, however, whether this reflected a perceived lack of value in what the stations broadcast. Overall, the participant farmers were of the view that the information supplied by radio would be more useful if the programmes

were longer and there were more opportunities to call in to get questions answered.

The farmers viewed face-to-face engagement as critical. In the words of one participant from Arua, "The issue of information on the radio is that on the radio we only receive. The radio people are not the ones to implement it." To this end, they expressed a desire for radio content to be coordinated with the government and CSO-supported 'experts' working in the communities so that the information provided by one supports the efforts of the other. A younger male farmer from Kibaale echoed the call of many farmers to coordinate radio broadcasting with face-to-face training and livelihoods interventions stating,

If they [extension workers] go through the radio, even if we don't know their faces, but whenever we hear the voice, we know that it's our man and whatever he is going to say there I will get it because he will have taught it in the language I understand.

Unsurprisingly, the participant farmers reported having greater access to mobile phones than to other ICTs such as the Internet. Many noted that it would be useful to access agricultural information via their mobile phones, but that they did not generally use their mobile phones to access or share such information. Unreliable network connectivity and the high cost of air time further limits the usefulness of mobiles. Some claimed to use their phones to share livelihoods information with their fellow farmers, while only a handful said they used them to access information about local markets. Among these farmers, however, distrust in the content received on their phones was expressed. Though some did not specify why they doubted what they received on their phones, others commented that the commodity prices on their phones do not match what they find at market. Also noteworthy is the finding that female farmers have far less access to mobile phones than their male counterparts.

The livelihoods information landscape of the participant farmers is populated with three primary actors: NAADS extension work-

ers, radio programming and fellow farmers. It is face-to-face sources, not electronic ones, which dominate their criticism. The participants' experience with NAADS and other opinion formers was seen as far from satisfactory, yet it is likely because it's from such face-to-face sources that farmers derive the most value that they are more critical. Likewise, radio programming is seen as a useful and important mechanism for receiving livelihoods information, but its value diminishes when content is not integrated into the wider information landscape of farmers. Despite their rapid proliferation, mobile phones are viewed by farmers as a potentially useful platform, but at the moment they remain peripheral and are not seen as a major source of livelihoods information.

### *Opinion Formers*

The following section outlines the perspectives of opinion formers from government, civil society and the research community on the role they play and how media and ICTs are used in Uganda's livelihoods information landscape.

### *Government Policymakers*

Government policymakers bring together different stakeholders, including CSOs, local government officials and the research community to shape Uganda's livelihoods policies and related interventions. The three participating government policymakers in this study suggested that CSOs inform policy, evaluate interventions and provide feedback between citizens and policymaking institutions.

Research is vital to providing the government with technical expertise on livelihoods innovations. Yet engagement between policymakers and the research community tends to vary. Policy and research are most coordinated when policymaking institutions, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, have affiliated research organisations

devoted to their field. In such cases, research is embedded within the policymaking process.

In contrast with what most farmers described, the policymaker interviewees emphasised the role local government institutions play in ensuring livelihoods information is shared between different communities around the country. They also viewed the media as a means for delivering livelihoods information to citizens and raising awareness about the government's work. However, engaging with the media, they claimed, presents many challenges including the failure of telecommunications companies and media houses (even those based in rural areas) to prioritise livelihoods issues. Consequently, the government must pay for the livelihoods coverage it wants. The result, they say, is that livelihoods issues do not appear frequently in the media. The interviewees further claimed that when the media do report about livelihoods issues, it is mostly in reaction to a specific news event or crisis. At these times, the media helps to ensure that citizens' concerns are heard by the government. The more prosaic, day-to-day livelihoods challenges faced by rural farmers get less coverage. While interviewees supported the idea of media playing a more sustained role in addressing livelihoods issues, they suggested that stronger links between the media and policymakers may be required before such a change can be effected.

Like many in the livelihoods sector, this group of interviewees were excited about the role that ICTs can play but equally cognizant of its infrastructural challenges. Current efforts to inform farmers about how to recognise new crop diseases through mobile phone messaging were mentioned within the context of the government's resource constraints. Specifically, there are impediments to incorporating ICTs as part of the interventions they support resulting from the costs charged by mobile network providers. They also acknowledged that limited energy supply and a lack of familiarity with new technologies can make the use of ICTs a challenge for farmers. In their view, ICT-based interventions must be mindful of these limita-

tions and implemented in concert with local broadcasters and agricultural extension worker.

#### *Local government officials*

The chief role of local government officials is to facilitate the national government's livelihoods interventions by disseminating livelihoods information to citizens and providing citizen feedback to the government. Local leaders work with a variety of government institutions on livelihoods issues, with NAADS being the most high-profile.

The respondents from this group claimed that NAADS has made a positive impact on their communities. Some noted that NAADS' effectiveness is hampered by the fact that it works with only a small percentage of the local population. Another major challenge according to this group of interviewees is the lack of trust NAADS garners among local farmers who "see these government programmes...as politics."

Local government officials reported that while the media plays an important role in providing livelihoods information to farmers, radio programming *alone* has only a limited impact on farmers' livelihoods. In their view, the information provided by radio can only be implemented when it is followed up by face-to-face support. As for mobile phones, these were seen as providing tips, prices and other small amounts of information. While each of the latter are important, they claimed that farmers often need more. In addition, accessibility, the cost of airtime and illiteracy are barriers to their increased uptake and usage.

#### *Extension workers*

NAADS extension workers disseminate information and inputs through farmer groups. Aside from other local farmers, extension workers often are farmers' first points of contact when livelihoods

problems arise. The extension workers interviewed say that farmer engagement with NAADS has been inconsistent. According to these interviewees, their main challenge is one of scale. There are simply too few of them, and they are poorly resourced. Consequently, they struggle to get even the farmers who are engaged with NAADS to implement the information they receive. According to one extension worker,

Copying rates are low and it is still a challenge to many of us to know why they don't adopt these good practices which don't require money, just a change in the way you are doing things...It is surprising that many of them do not take up the innovations.

The participant extension workers reported seeing themselves as a link between the many groups providing livelihoods information and local farmers. They work closely with researchers, particularly those embedded in the Ministry of Agriculture. Some claimed that government officials, especially elected ones, can politicise livelihoods issues in ways that are unhelpful.<sup>11</sup>

The extension workers interviewed maintained radio can help them to reach more farmers and claimed to frequently use it to communicate with farmers in their districts. They emphasised that radio is a useful way for farmers to hold NAADS to account and that working with the media could lead to increased demand by farmers for NAADS inputs and information. Yet among the four extension workers interviewed, there was a sense that their work could be better coordinated and supported by the media and others in the sector. For instance, the cost of airtime on commercial radio stations limits the number of farmers that can be reached.

The interviewees reported rarely using ICTs to provide information to farmers, noting that it is CSOs in their areas that are pio-

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<sup>11</sup> Fieldwork was conducted in the months preceding the 2011 general election. This may have had an impact on extension workers' views of policymaker engagement with livelihoods issues.

neering their use. Some use ICTs to look up information for themselves, but such usage has not been institutionalised.

*Civil society representatives*

Civil society organisations play a variety of roles in Uganda's livelihoods information landscape including collaborating with the government in formulating and implementing its livelihoods policies. The three interviewees from the CSOs that participated in the study reported working closely with researchers and using their research to inform their own interventions.

The interviewees felt strongly that citizens should be more engaged in the governance of livelihoods issues. They noted that, at present, citizens have few opportunities to feed into the policymaking process. This lack of familiarity with the policymaking process, they assert, limits citizens' ability to lobby for their concerns.

Like policymakers and extension workers, CSO representatives recognised the ability of media to help in reaching rural audiences with livelihoods information. In the participants' view, however, the media is not doing enough to support citizen engagement in governance around livelihoods issues. By highlighting their concerns and engaging policymakers in discussions around these issues, they say the media can "champion peoples' voices." They also stated that greater media engagement with livelihoods issues can increase citizens' influence on government policy and help them to hold their leaders to account.

The individuals representing the CSOs that participated in this study reported rarely using mobile phones or the Internet to communicate livelihoods information to citizens. While this is not necessarily indicative of the sector as a whole, it is a telling reminder of how new and relatively un-integrated such technologies remain.

*Farming association heads*

Throughout Uganda, local farmers come together to form various associations which enable them to access information and services provided by the government and CSOs. The heads of two such associations were interviewed for this study. Each claimed that even with these structures in place farmers still do not have access to enough livelihoods information.

They suggested that local farming associations have little impact in how government livelihoods policies are formed and implemented, stating that farmers are "hardly consulted." The result, they say, is a lack of ownership by local farmers which means that government interventions suffer from a lack of engagement and uptake.

Both interviewees reported that illiteracy is a barrier to farmers understanding and implementing the information provided. Seen in this light, they viewed rural radio as an important tool, asserting that more stations need to have programming dedicated to the issue. In their view, interactive programmes broadcast at consistent times, the topics of which are communicated to farmers beforehand, would make the radio an even more useful forum for farmers to get their livelihoods questions answered. Echoing the comments of other actors, these two individuals were adamant about the need for radio output to be complemented with other sources of information, particularly face-to-face interaction. They also suggested that while farmers use mobile phones to share livelihoods information with other farmers, their usefulness in connecting farmers with experts, on the radio or otherwise, is limited by the cost of airtime and farmers not feeling they are getting value for their money.

One association head described how a Grameen Foundation initiative in his area was successfully integrating ICTs through combining technology and on-the-ground support. He explained,

...we have extension workers who are sent into the villages and we have these CKWs [Community Knowledge Workers] who use the phones with us. By using a phone, there is no way they can tell you that they do not



have transport because you just walk and go to them and then they give you the information unlike looking for an extension worker.

### *Livelihoods researchers*

The research community supports other opinion formers, particularly in government and civil society, by providing technical advice and helping to identify solutions to Uganda's livelihoods challenges. The researchers interviewed for this study said they interact with farmers when they are conducting their fieldwork, but are not in close contact with them on a daily basis. They rarely communicate their findings directly to citizens because they are generally not funded to do so.

Researchers said their engagement with other opinion formers was limited, with policymakers consulting published reports in lieu of directly engaging with the authors of the works. This dynamic changes in emergency situations when contact between researchers and policymakers becomes more frequent. Some researcher participants viewed increased engagement with policymakers as entailing risks such as elected officials potentially interfering with the communicating of research, especially if the work is seen to be politically sensitive.

The interviewees all reported that their engagement with the media is limited and, at times, fraught with distrust. They rarely approach the media to disseminate their work and media practitioners rarely approach them. Echoing the comments of policymakers, the participant researchers claimed that the media focuses on livelihoods issues mostly during emergencies, while citizens need information *before* a crisis hits. They further claimed that when they are in contact with the media, journalists' lack of understanding of scientific issues leads to inaccurate reporting about research findings. In the words of one interviewee, "Sometimes you say something and when you see it in the newspaper it's not what you told them."

*Media practitioners*

Seven media practitioners participated in this study, with most acknowledging that livelihoods issues are not a priority for their respective media outlets. The reporters from rural radio stations stated that despite their employer's limited resources their stations were trying to provide livelihoods information to farmers and to ensure that farmer's concerns are heard. They did, however, believe that few stations are prioritizing livelihoods programming. As one interviewee from this group put it, "One story is like one grain in a basket.... If this one radio station runs a story on climate change once in a week, I think it can't do much, but if it is done collectively, I think it can create an impact."

The interviewees from this group identified numerous reasons for the media's failure to adequately cover livelihoods issues. According to some of the interviewees, reporters find the topic overly technical, resulting in stories that tend to politicise livelihoods issues and not explain enough about their causes and implications.

They also suggested that government officials are often an unreliable source for such information. There was a sense that in the light of their lack of technical expertise on livelihoods issues, government officials either provide the media with inaccurate information or simply refuse to speak about these matters. In the words of one interviewee, "These people treat the media with a lot of suspicion. They think the media will manipulate that information to work against them or to get them into trouble. So they don't give it when the media approaches them."

The participant media practitioners also reported that their relationship with the research community is limited by researchers' fear of how their findings will be reported. When they do meet, media practitioners say researchers speak in overly-technical language which they struggle to make useful and understandable to their audience.

*Radio content*

To better understand how rural media communicates livelihoods information, a content analysis was conducted on one month's livelihoods programming from each of the four participant rural radio stations: Open Gate FM, Unity FM, Radio Pacis and Kagadi-Kibaale Community Radio (KKCR). A total of 25 episodes of livelihoods programming was received from the participating stations. Each programme averaged approximately 32 minutes in length and most featured multiple formats. Table 1 below lists the specific programmes recorded from each station:

**Table 1: Programmes analysed**

Station	Programme Title	Number of Recordings
Radio Pacis	Farmers Talk	5
	News Journal - Environment Programme	2
Open Gate FM	Agriculture Programme	4
KKCR	Urban Farming	3
	Sponsored Agriculture Programme	1
	Environment Programme	2
	Water Integrity Programme	2
Unity FM	Sponsored Agriculture Programme	3
	Business Forum	3

**Topics Covered**

The topics covered by each programme were determined using three different measures. First, the main topic of each programme was assessed by reviewing the proportion of time spent on a given subject. Second, topics were coded as having received 'extensive discussion' if

they were covered substantively but were not the main topic. Finally, topics were coded as having received a 'brief mention' if they were covered in programming to a lesser extent.

The main topics of livelihoods programmes are grounded in the needs of local citizens. Programmes focus on a range of issues that concern farmers. Within our sample the two most frequently raised main topics were agricultural and income-generation (see Table 2 below).

**Table 2: Main topics of programmes**

Main topic <i>[Base = all livelihoods programmes (25)]</i>	Frequency in programming
How to grow a specific crop	24%
Livestock keeping	16%
Business issues (inc. general income-generating activities)	12%
Other	12%
Corruption	8%
Tree cutting, planting, preservation	8%
Cleanliness/hygiene of community and environment	8%
Water provision for human use/consumption	4%
Crop health	4%
Market information	4%

Despite being the main topic of only one programme, information about local markets including the prices of goods for purchase and sale, was found to be frequently present in the programming that was analysed. An analysis of the topics that receive 'extensive discussion' or a 'brief mention' demonstrates that market information is included in 40 percent of all programmes.

### **Comprehension**

Programmes are broadcast predominantly in the local language of the communities where they are based: in eastern Uganda, Open Gate FM output is mainly in Lugisu; in northern Uganda, Unity FM is mostly in Luo; in West Nile, Radio Pacis is mostly in Lugbara; and in western Uganda, KKCR output is mostly in Runyoro. Nearly all (92 percent) programmes in the sample also included some English, which is used mainly by programme hosts or guests.

Content analysis assessed the amount of technical information in programming and whether the topics covered could be understood by an average listener. Approximately two thirds (64 percent) of programmes were considered free from technical information. In each instance that technical language was used, it was done so by a programme guest or interviewee. Despite the occasional use of technical jargon, nearly all (92 percent) programmes cover livelihoods topics in a way that average people presumably could understand.

### **Contributors to Programming**

The content analysis also examined the range of people who appear as hosts, guests or are otherwise present or heard in the programming. Each programme in the sample has a host and nearly half (44 percent) have in-studio guests. Programme hosts and guests were overwhelmingly male: 92 percent of all programme hosts are male as are approximately three quarters (76 percent) of in-studio guests.

Farmers' preferred sources of livelihoods information (e.g., perceived experts such as NAADS representatives) do not appear frequently as guests on stations' livelihoods programmes (see Table 3 below). Within the sample, CSO representatives appeared more than other opinion formers, NAADS representatives only rarely, and livelihoods researchers not at all.

In addition to in-studio guests, programmes engage contributors in a variety of ways, including live call-ins and pre-recorded interviews. Table 4 below presents the different categories of contributors present in programming, regardless of their method of engagement.

**Table 3: Types of guests in programmes**

<b>Types of guests</b> <i>[Base = programmes with in-studio guests (11)]</i>	<b>Frequency in programming</b>
CSO representative	27%
Regular citizen	18%
District government personnel	18%
Representative of local business	18%
Local councillor	9%
Parish chief/personnel	9%
National government personnel	9%
Local farming organization representative	9%
NAADS representative	9%

The information presented in Table 4 reveals that regular citizens appear in programming more frequently than any other type of contributor. Farmers' primary face-to-face sources for livelihoods information appear much less frequently. Within the sample analysed, CSO representatives appeared in only three programmes (twice as guests) and NAADS representatives in only two. Conspicuous by their absence are livelihoods researchers, who did not appear in programming at all.

**Table 4: Types of contributors in programmes**

Category of contributor <i>[Base = all programming (25)]</i>	Frequency in programming
Regular citizen/Audience member	60%
Local business representative	12%
CSO representative	12%
NAADS model farmer	8%
NAADS representative	8%
District government personnel	8%
Local councillor	8%
Parish chief/personnel	4%
National government personnel	4%
Political candidate	4%
Local farming organisation	4%

Apart from audience members who call in to programmes, most contributors take part in programming through in-studio discussions or pre-recorded interviews. Unlike audience call-ins, they also tend to speak for extended periods. Farmers thus have few opportunities to tune into livelihoods programming and hear one of their preferred sources for livelihoods information.

#### *Audience Engagement*

More than one third (38 percent) of all programmes in the sample featured live phone-ins from audience members, with each programme that had a call-in segment featuring at least three calls. In most instances, audience members call in to ask questions, make comments or share their experience regarding the topics discussed. Audience members frequently ask for information about market prices and advice on how to grow crops. Across all programmes a

total of 70 audience members are heard, of which the vast majority (84 percent) are male.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study suggest that farmers are not getting enough livelihoods information to meet their many needs. In Uganda, farmers receive information about livelihoods issues mainly from four sources: government agricultural extension workers, CSO representatives, local radio stations and their fellow farmers. Most farmers that participated in this study indicated that they value most highly the information they receive from livelihoods experts external to their community. Yet their preferred sources for such information – government extension workers and civil society representatives – are relatively few in number. They also indicated that they view it as a duty of the government, not CSOs, to provide them with livelihoods support. Hence, they expect more from government representatives, including extension workers, policymakers and others.

While policymakers coordinate the government's livelihoods work they are rarely in contact with rural farmers and do not appear frequently in livelihoods radio programming. The result is that the media does not fulfil its role in providing citizens with information about government livelihoods policies. Nor does it act as a platform for holding government officials accountable for livelihoods-related policies.

In the development sector, livelihoods researchers were traditionally looked to as an important source for innovations. The findings from our research reinforce the importance of moving away from this paternalistic, expert-driven view. Researchers rarely disseminate their work directly to the public and have an uneasy relationship with the media, which makes them unlikely to feature in the broadcast media. Local business owners are an important presence



in rural communities but are seen by farmers as an unreliable source of information about livelihoods issues.

Radio provides an important platform for livelihoods information, but farmers who participated in this study are adamant that the media can do more. They want information on air about the weather and local market prices, but many need more than this. Many rural Ugandans are resource-poor and need to know how to get the most from their land and how to protect crops and livestock. It is the media's coverage of these more technical issues that appears to be particularly inadequate. The sources for livelihoods information that farmers know, trust and find the most useful are rarely on the air. While the lack of experts on air could be seen as a positive step toward a less paternalistic and more inclusive approach to livelihoods communication that prioritises indigenous knowledge as well as advances driven by the research community, it is precisely from these 'experts' that farmers most want to hear. With face-to-face engagement between farmers and their preferred information sources infrequent, it is in this gap that farmers and opinion formers see the media playing a critical role. They say the media can help amplify farmers' voices, call greater attention to citizens' concerns and provide a platform for citizens to hold their leaders to account. Yet at present, this role largely goes unfulfilled.

Compared to the broadcast media, mobile phones play a less significant role in the livelihoods communication landscape. Aside from select government and civil society interventions, ICTs are generally not used to deliver livelihoods information to farmers. While some farmers have access to mobile phones, their widespread use to access livelihoods information is limited by the cost of airtime, lack of network coverage, and a perception that what they receive via their phones is not of much value.

That some farmers who have used ICTs to access livelihoods information do not trust the information they provide should also serve as a warning. Farmers need to derive a value from whatever

content ICTs provide if they are going to play a greater role in the livelihoods communication landscape. Additionally, given the infra-structural and financial barriers to scaling up their usage, relying on ICTs to fill the gaps in farmers' communication landscape –to connect them to information sources or provide them directly with the information they need – may risk leaving behind the individuals and communities that need the information the most.

Ultimately, the impact that ICTs have on farmers' livelihoods mimics that of the traditional media. Both offer opportunities for farmers to receive and share livelihoods information and provide a platform to hold their leaders accountable. Yet Uganda's current livelihoods communication landscape is still one that is largely built on old technologies: power lines and phone masts, and most importantly, people. For the media and ICTs to play a more effective role in helping farmers access information and shape policies, the barriers to ICT access and lack of coordination between farmers' preferred information sources and the media must be addressed.

### **Appendix 1 - Informal Advisory Group Members**

Consolata Acayo, *Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry & Fisheries*

Joyce Adupa, *National Agricultural Research Laboratories*

Emily Arayo, *Farm Radio International*

Sudi Bamulesewa, *United States Agency for International Development*

Paul Isabirye, *Climate Change Unit, Government of Uganda*

Geoffrey Kamese, *National Association of Professional Environmentalists*

Richard Kimbowa, *Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development*

Anthony Mugenyi, *National Agricultural Advisory Services*

Augustine Mwendya, *Uganda National Farmers Federation*

Bernard Namanya, *Climate Change Concern*

Mike Segawa, *The Daily Monitor*

Gerald Tenywa, *The New Vision*

## **Appendix 2 - Opinion Formers Interviewed**

### **Government policymakers**

Eng. Gilbert Kimanzi, Ministry of Water & Environment

Mr. Okasai Opolot, Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry & Fisheries

Mr. Dickson Baguma, National Agricultural Research Organisation

### **Livelihoods researchers**

Dr. Leena Tripathi, International Institute of Tropical Agriculture Uganda

Dr. Josephine Namaganda, National Banana Research Program

Dr. J. O. Okumu, Institute of Environment & Natural Resources, Makerere University

Dr. Charles Wana-Etyem, Warner Consultants Uganda

### **Civil society representatives**

Mr. Davis Ddamulira, Water Aid Uganda

Ms. Dorothy Baziwe, Uganda Rainwater Association

Ms. Agnes Kirabo, Volunteer Efforts for Development Concerns

### **Media**

Mr. Patrick Luganda, Network of Climate Journalists for the Greater Horn of Africa

Mr. Andrew Ndaula Kalema, The New Vision

Ms. Annette Bogere, Applab Uganda, Grameen Foundation

Mr. Francis Cadri, Radio Pacis

Mr. Patrick Ebong, Unity FM

Mr. Wilfred Masaba, Open Gate FM

Mr. Ismael Kasoha, Kagadi-Kibaale Community Radio

### **Local leaders**

Mr. Lawrence Alisiku, Local Councillor, Kijomoro sub-county, Maracha District

Ms. Catherine Akullo, Local Councillor, Amach sub-county, Lira District

Mr. Ahmed Washak, Local Councillor, Bungokho sub-county, Mbale District

Ms. Josephine Nakato, Local Councillor, Kagadi sub-county, Kibaale District

### **Extension workers**

Ms. Jema Oleru, NAADS Coordinator, Arua District

Dr. Benda Kirungi Katali, NAADS Coordinator, Kibaale District

Mr. Godfrey Acuti Ojuka, NAADS Coordinator, Lira District

Mr. Paul Mwambu, NAADS Coordinator, Mbale District

#### **Farming association heads**

Mr. Fred Musinguzi, District Farming Association, Kibaale

Mr. Patrick Kibete, Farmers Forum, Mbale District

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# **Community Radio, Gender and ICTs in West Africa**

A Comparative Study of Women's Participation  
in Community Radio Through Mobile Phone  
Technologies

Frances Fortune and Cindy Chungong

This case study analyses the intersection between radio, gender and information and communication technologies (ICTs) in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea. Specifically, it examines whether recent improvements in radio broadcast coverage and the spread of SMS technology are increasing women's access to information and providing them with a platform that adequately meets their needs. The findings show that, despite cultural and socio-economic barriers, women enjoy listening to radio and want to contribute to debates in their local public sphere. For today's younger women, it has become easier to overcome traditional obstacles to expressing themselves publicly, as well as to embrace the newest communication technologies, such as text messaging, that allow them access to a public platform. However, it is still difficult to get ordinary women of all ages to communicate with their local radio. Community radio is a male-dominated entity that often consigns women's programming to a narrow interpretation of gender issues, focused on women's roles as wives, mothers and homemakers, and does not address the listening needs of women as political and economic

actors in their own right. Thus, while the research findings show that women are listening to radio, it is evident that *radio is not listening to women*. However, women *are* willing to contribute more input into their community radio stations, if provided with the right incentives: more female presenters to increase women's voices, quality programming reflecting a more accurate picture of women's experiences, and interaction channels systematically designed to take into account the communications obstacles women face.

Despite the growth of social media and access to mobile phones throughout West Africa, radio remains the leading source of information, far outpacing television, newspapers and the Internet. It is a sustainable, cost-effective medium, able to reach large populations in a way that is relevant to local cultures and oral traditions. Radio has the advantage of accessing both literate and illiterate audiences, making it more appropriate for populations across Sub-Saharan Africa with low literacy rates. While itself a neutral tool, it is a medium that can lend the marginalized a voice and spread useful information, invaluable functions in transitional states such as the three under study here—Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia.<sup>12</sup> Community radio is a specific form of radio with added benefits: it is dedicated to serving the public interest of a particular geographic group or community and is usually broadcast in local languages. In contrast to state broadcasters, “community radio involves community organization, joint thinking and decision-making, all of which ... entail great potential for empowering communities and building a democratic society” (Center for International Media Assistance & National Endowment for Democracy, 2007).

Due to their dedication to serving community needs, community radio stations in West Africa play a valuable role in informing and representing public opinion. Current rapid expansions in information and communications technologies (ICTs) present a great potential for community radio stations to better serve audiences and encourage broad participation, in particular through mobile phones

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<sup>12</sup> Sierra Leone experienced strife and civil conflict from 1991 to 2002. Liberia experienced war from 1989 to 2003. Guinea, while not experiencing war, has been in a fragile state since holding its first democratic election in 2010.



and short message service (SMS). Africa's poor fixed-line infrastructure, coupled with increasingly low mobile phone costs due to robust competition amongst service providers, has paved the way for the so-called 'mobile revolution.' The rate of mobile phone usage in Africa is growing faster than anywhere else in the world. Furthermore, text messaging from mobile devices has become the most widely used data application globally, with over 5 billion active users; currently approximately 200,000 SMS are sent per second (ITU, 2010).

Community radio stations in West Africa have begun to harness the power of mobile phones and SMS technology. For example, SMS is already being used by 83.8 percent of stations surveyed in a seven-country study across West Africa (Panos Institute West Africa, 2008). Listeners can call and text during interactive radio broadcasts to contribute news, views, stories and feedback. This input means radio stations have access to up-to-the-minute insight on the most pressing issues in their community and an instant form of evaluation of the quality of their programming. On the audience side, this communication tool allows listeners to have a voice in their community radio. In the long-term this leads to greater democratization, as there is little restriction to who can call or text (as compared to who might be chosen to participate in panel discussions, for example), and thus promotes inclusion of a broad spectrum of opinions in debates.

Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that revolutions in the media and technology landscape are occurring within social and cultural systems that, though increasingly under pressure to change, are in many cases still conservative. Communication and access to information is overwhelmingly concentrated in traditional centres of power such as the capital city or provincial administrative seats. In Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, public channels of communication are dominated by men, with women's voices limited to the private sphere, if at all given a space. Even community radio stations, with the mandate to reach out to all sectors of the population, tend

to be male-dominated structures, with token women's programs and participation.

To better understand the role of gender in the convergence of community radio with new technological innovations, Search for Common Ground (SFCG) conducted a comparative research study in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, between November 2010 and June 2011, with funding from Carleton University's Centre for Media and Transitional Societies. SFCG is an international conflict resolution organization operating in five countries in West Africa,<sup>13</sup> which works in close partnership with radio stations to open channels of information and dialogue that can effectively mitigate rumours, prevent and resolve conflict, and promote a more inclusive exchange of opinions to help move societies toward security and development. One key axis of SFCG's West African strategy is to promote inclusion of women in decision-making and other societal processes. This research project was intended to both provide evidence-based information on the gender, radio and ICT landscape in West Africa and to better inform SFCG's approach to peace and development issues in the countries in which it operates.

### **Gender, Development and Limitations to ICT Access**

Development practitioners and feminists have long theorized that access to knowledge is key to women's empowerment. This hypothesis has been confirmed by a series of rigorous investigations on ICTs, participatory information, and women's access to Internet and mobile technologies. These include, for example, work by the United Nations Development Program on Communication for Empowerment (UNDP, 2006), a study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development on the African Economic Outlook (OECD, 2009), and research by the National Endowment for Democracy on

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<sup>13</sup> Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. SFCG also has several other country offices in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

the Impact and Challenges to the Development of Community Radio (Center for International Media Assistance, 2007). Projects carried out by the Gender Research in Africa into ICTs for Empowerment project (Gertrudes, Mandlate, Ginger, Gaster & Macome, 2009) and by the International Development Research Centre (Opoku-Mensah, 2000) highlight how ICTs provide a platform for women's voices to have a greater impact in the shaping of public opinion. Researchers Hafkin and Taggart (2001) argue that ICTs allow isolated women to gain access to information that was not previously made available, thus helping them to become better-informed members of society and empowering them to speak on issues previously limited to men.

Despite the benefit that ICTs can bring to movements for women's empowerment, there remains much work to be done to fully tap this potential. Conservative cultures prevail in West Africa, particularly in rural areas, and are usually structured around a highly patriarchal system. According to Elijah and Ogunlade (2006), women are traditionally restricted to the family network, while public and community systems are the male domain. Since their main role is expected to be domestic, the vast majority of rural women normally listen to the radio at home, where access to newer technologies such as Internet is more limited (Huyer, 2002). Even community radio, as a *public* forum, remains dominated by male voices and interests.

Further, the education system favours male uptake of new technologies. A lack of education is a significant obstacle to women's capacity to access technologies, and to understand and articulate themselves in public debates (Myers, 2004). Even in more affluent settings where women have opportunities to become educated, it is men who are encouraged to learn and use technology, giving them a distinct advantage in a knowledge-based society (Khan & Ghadially, 2009). Due to confinement to the private sphere and a lack of access to ICTs, women are more likely to be passive receivers of technology than producers (Hafkin & Taggart, 2001). This often means that

women's needs, interests, and priorities are marginalized by male-dominated media production structures.

## Methodology

This research project involved a comparative study across three West African countries (Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea) to explore the current intersection between radio, gender and ICTs. The broad research questions were:

- 1) **Listenership:** Is community radio station programming taking into account women's preferences and improving their access to information?
- 2) **Participation:** Are the increasingly popular methods of interactive radio broadcasting – including text-messaging and call-ins – sufficiently engaging women and providing a platform for information and dialogue that meets their interests?
- 3) **FrontlineSMS:** Can implementing an SMS mobilization program like Frontline SMS increase women's interaction with radio programming? FrontlineSMS is a software program which manages text messages on computers, thus facilitating the ability of radio stations to engage their audiences.<sup>14</sup>

An expected outcome of the research was to provide evidence-based recommendations for inclusive development and peacebuilding strategies in West Africa. To respond to the research questions and achieve this outcome, an integrated methodology and tools were employed for all three countries. An all-female research team was recruited, as SFCG's previous experience, particularly in rural areas,

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<sup>14</sup> This software program was selected above others for several reasons: its easy accessibility as free, open-source software (meaning it is regularly updated with feedback from users); its small size and simplicity, making it easy to download and train target groups to use; and the commitment of the FrontlineSMS community to using ICTs for empowerment. For more information see [www.frontlinesms.com](http://www.frontlinesms.com).

has shown that it is far more likely for women to freely express themselves to other women than to men.

Research was carried out in a total of six communities (two each from Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea), for a period of six weeks each, according to the following selection criteria:

- Geographically outside the main urban hub of the country (i.e. Freetown in Sierra Leone, Monrovia in Liberia and Conakry in Guinea);
- Proximity to a well-established community radio station with wide coverage in the region (so that both urban and rural populations are able to tune in), regular interactive programming and using computer-based technology.

To conduct this study a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative methods were employed:

1. Surveys administered to women
2. Community Radio Staff Questionnaires and Station Observation Forms
3. Focus Group Discussions
4. FrontlineSMS Data Collection

**Table 1: Selected Communities**

Country	Town	Community Radio Station
Liberia	Gbarnga	Radio Gbarnga
	Buchanan	Radio Gbehzohn
Guinea	Mamou	Mamou Rural Radio
	Kindia	Kindia Rural Radio
Sierra Leone	Mile 91	Radio Gbafth FM 91
	Kenema	Eastern Radio

### *Surveys*

To investigate women's radio listening and participation habits, enumerators administered surveys among adult women, of all education levels, civil statuses and occupational backgrounds. Following previous research and cultural conventions in West Africa,<sup>15</sup> women were considered 'adult' after the age of 15 years, rather than the legal age of majority (18). This definition allowed the survey to capture the demographic of young students, an important element since young women are more likely to embrace new technologies. To best capture generational disparities, the surveying was weighted to the general population distribution, approximately the same in the three countries: of adult women, 60 percent are between the ages of 15-35 years old; 40 percent are 35 years and older. The former group was considered 'younger' women for research purposes, while the latter was considered 'older'.

The purposive method was used, meaning deliberately seeking out the required targets in places where they were likely to be found: markets, health centres, salons, schools, etc. An element of randomisation was introduced by selecting for interview every second woman who fulfilled the criteria. Efforts were made to obtain a reasonably representative sample, by surveying both rural and urban areas. Though it was not always possible to question women on their own (especially in markets), as far as was possible, each interviewee was isolated to avoid third-party interference.

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example The Hironelle Foundation 2010 Media Use Survey.

**Table 2: Total Female Population Surveyed**

Country	Total sample size	Younger women		Older women	
		Number	%	Number	%
Sierra Leone	535	323	60.5	212	39.5
Liberia	600	359	59.8	241	40.2
Guinea	518	312	60.2	206	39.8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1653</b>	<b>994</b>	<b>60.1</b>	<b>659</b>	<b>39.9</b>

*Community Radio Staff Questionnaires and Station Observation*

Researchers conducted two separate interviews at the community radio station in each target area, one with the radio station manager and one with the presenter of a program favoured by women listeners, to explore their qualitative level of “buy in” and commitment to addressing women’s needs.

The questionnaires provided baseline information on each radio’s in-house procedures for developing programs, assessing quality and gathering listener feedback, as well as an overview of their assumptions concerning women listenership/interaction. As a complement, the researchers observed the radio station’s programming to gain an overall understanding of the general nature of broadcasts and audience interaction.

These tools enabled researchers to assess the unique broadcast contexts of each radio station: different broadcast hours (for example, in Guinea, the stations were off-air throughout the afternoon); different emphasis on local languages (most programming in Liberia was in English; in Sierra Leone, mainly in the official national languages English or Krio; in Guinea, almost entirely in local languages,

rather than French); different percentages of interactive programs; different formats for women's program, etc.

### *Focus Groups*

Consolidating the results from the women's surveys, researchers probed for a deeper, qualitative understanding of the way in which women were using their community radio, their degree of use and ease with mobile phones, and the barriers to participation in interactive programming that they faced. A variety of focus group sessions were conducted in each community, covering a range of socio-economic groups: younger women (15-35 year olds); older women (36+ year olds); illiterate women or those from more vulnerable groups; women leaders in the community; and female radio station staff.

**Table 3: Focus group discussions conducted**

Country	Community	Number of FGD	Total number of participants
Sierra Leone	Mile 91	4	25
	Kenema	4	16
Liberia	Gbarnga	4	20
	Buchanan	5	22
Guinea	Mamou	5	24
	Kindia	4	25
Total		26	132

### *FrontlineSMS Data Collection*

For each participating community radio station, the researcher provided a GSM modem and a laptop computer containing the Front-



lineSMS software.<sup>16</sup> Staff were then trained on how to use the program; thereafter it was launched to archive all text messages received during programming.

For the first three weeks, FrontlineSMS was simply used to collect baseline data on listeners texting in for the most popular program and for the program identified as most popular among women listeners through the survey. The data was disaggregated by gender based on the name of the sender.

During the last three weeks of monitoring, some of the advanced features of FrontlineSMS were implemented: text messages were sent to all saved contacts in the FrontlineSMS database, to remind listeners to tune into each upcoming women's-preferred program. In addition, a "thank you" reply was automatically sent via SMS to all listeners who texted in during broadcast so as to demonstrate appreciation and encourage future interactivity.

At the end of the research period, data from the two periods was compared to determine any changes in interactivity, particularly among women.

### **Research Limitations**

With a limited amount of time for field research, it was more difficult to reach women in isolated areas, although local field contacts and radio station staff facilitated access as much as was possible. As a result, there was an urban bias to the data, as demonstrated by the fact that the average levels of literacy and education in the sample were far higher than the national averages.

The limited timeframe also prevented long-term mentorship of radio station staff – many of whom had very limited ICT skills – in the use of FrontlineSMS prior to data collection. As a result, there were inconsistencies in the implementation of the software by sta-

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<sup>16</sup> The equipment remained with the station afterwards, to encourage them to use the new tools sustainably.

tion staff over the six weeks, the consequences of which are discussed further below in the results section.

Finally, the research focused almost entirely on women and radio – yet there are many other actors, such as husbands and traditional leaders, who directly influence listening habits. A longer timeframe and larger scope for the study would have enabled a more comprehensive analysis of the determinant factors in women’s listenership and interaction with their local radio stations.

### **Key Findings**

Though certain urban biases emerged in our survey samples, and each context demonstrated distinct characteristics, some broad trends from survey results, focus groups and interviews nonetheless emerged with regard to the potential for gender-inclusive radio and women’s participation.

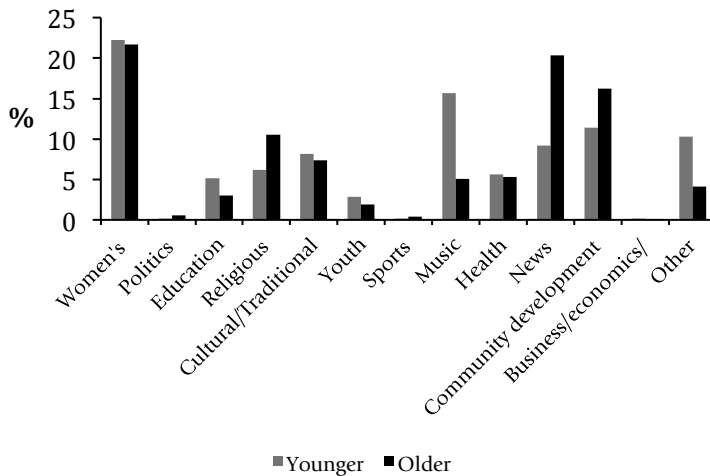
#### *Listenership*

Overall, Sierra Leone had the highest radio listenership rate at 85.8 percent of those women surveyed, followed by Liberia at 81 percent and Guinea at 73.6 percent. Women overwhelmingly responded that they would like to hear more women’s programming in all three countries.<sup>17</sup> In terms of what they actually listened to most, women’s programming is also the overall favourite type of programming for both older and younger women, as shown in Figure 1 below.

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<sup>17</sup> Women’s programming refers to radio broadcasts explicitly designed by the station to target their female audiences.

Figure 1: Favourite program, by age



There were variations within this pattern however: in Liberia, women's programming was much more entertainment-based and therefore younger women preferred it more than older women did. In Sierra Leone, on the other hand, older women preferred women's programming, which was more focused on domestic issues, marital relations, child-rearing and education. In Guinea, women's programming was far less popular among both age groups than in the other two countries, likely due to the unfavourable programming hours.<sup>18</sup>

Generally, women in the respondent sample liked to listen to programmes that informed and educated them, and dealt with the interests and issues that affect their daily livelihoods. Women appreciated women's programmes as a space to express themselves, to participate in public life, educate them on their rights and give them protection against harmful traditional mindsets.<sup>19</sup> Also, women usu-

<sup>18</sup> In Kindia the programme was broadcast at 10:00 a.m. on Sunday mornings when most women were at their farms. The popularity of the women's programme was much higher in Mamou, where it was broadcast in the evening.

<sup>19</sup> For example, in Mamou, the radio station offered specific programming on the need to stop the practice of female genital mutilation, despite receiving much criticism and harassment from community, traditional and religious leaders. Indeed, the radio was

ally listened to the radio with their families and thus messages on women's issues also reached men. Indeed, during focus groups across all three countries, older women testified that listening to the radio with their husbands had led to some degree of abandonment of traditional mindsets and behaviour, including domestic violence. "The radio," noted one participant, "is helping women to become responsible and that is an element of emancipation."

Almost no women surveyed cited politics or business/economics/finance programmes as their favourite type. Yet these are issues that greatly affect women's livelihoods, especially as women are usually a source – if not *the* main source – of income for their households. While women did not tend to listen to such programmes, they did express a desire to do so. For example, having greater access to informed and tailored programming on economics was cited as important for agriculturalists, petty traders and businesswomen. As for politics, in Liberia, where presidential elections were scheduled for late 2011 with an incumbent female candidate, women had ideas for elections-based programmes. In Guinea they highlighted the need for radio to push for women's registration in the anticipated legislative elections, as well as for programmes that would advocate for greater female participation in decision-making bodies.

There was a notable interest in political and economic issues by women, but radio stations were failing to present these issues in such a way as to engage women. A contributing factor may be that these subjects are traditionally male-dominated, leading to few public female voices weighing in on debates and thus less encouragement for women to listen and participate.

Another important research finding was that women prefer to listen to the voices of other women on the radio and are better able to relate to issues when hearing them from a woman's perspective. As

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one of the few institutions openly discussing this deeply-rooted custom and calling for its abolition.

explained in focus groups, women felt that, “every woman who speaks on the radio expresses the needs of all of us.” Younger women claimed to feel more inspired and motivated to follow advice on the radio when it came from another woman and noted that female broadcasters talked about issues that they did not feel comfortable raising with their parents or even friends. Guinea was the only country where the surveys showed the opposite trend, in that most women surveyed preferred hearing men’s voices. However, when probed in focus groups discussions, all women across age and occupational groups agreed that they would rather listen to women talking about the issues that concerned women specifically.

### *Participation*

Based on observation and interviews with station staff, interaction between female listeners and the local community radio station is significant. Interactive programming in all three countries had no shortage of female callers. According to survey results, over a quarter of women who listened to radio had called a station at least once, though only 13 percent had sent text messages.<sup>20</sup> Liberia had the highest percentage of women callers (32 percent) despite not being the top in terms of access to or ownership of phones among respondents. The relatively high level of participation (compared to 22 percent in Sierra Leone, for example) can be partially attributed to the fact that the two Liberian radio stations had a better technical set-up for interaction: both had set up partnerships with private phone companies to ensure constant electricity and provide a choice of networks to allow people to call more cheaply or for free.

When disaggregating the results, the research showed that the principal determinant for calling was, unsurprisingly, direct access to mobile phones. Indeed, the most common reason given for never

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<sup>20</sup> Given that only 38% of respondents claimed to know how to use text messaging functions, the low figure is perhaps unsurprising.

having called was the lack of a mobile phone. There was no consistent trend in favour of either age group; in spite of the fact that younger women are significantly more likely to know how to text, age was not a direct determinant of likelihood of interaction. Rather, the key demographic factor in participation in community radio appeared to be social class, as defined by literacy, education and occupational status: women who called, and in particular those who texted, tended to have higher literacy rates, to be more highly educated, and to have higher occupational status (for example, as a government or office worker compared to a petty trader).

Overwhelmingly, women who called and texted said they did so because they wanted to contribute their viewpoint to the programme. Furthermore, very few of the women who had never contacted their stations claimed this was because they were uncomfortable with sharing their opinion or having their voice publicly heard. This discredits more conservative notions that women are not interested in having a public platform to express their experiences or in having a stake in key debates.

However, one important finding from the research was that nearly one-quarter of radio listeners who had never called a station cited a lack of interest for their failure to participate. This implied that radio station programming was failing to motivate women sufficiently to engage. Yet 90 percent of women who said they had never called also said they were open to calling in the future. This again demonstrated that women wanted to participate in their community radio but there remained significant obstacles to overcome in order for them to do so.

#### *FrontlineSMS*

There were several technical challenges encountered during the implementation of FrontlineSMS, including electricity outages and computer breakdowns, highlighting the challenges of technology in

rural areas and affecting the ability to collect data consistently. Furthermore, despite recognising the utility of the new software and its features, a general lack of proficiency in ICTs among radio station staff proved to be an obstacle, especially in Guinea. Finally, high staff turnover in stations (with most presenters being volunteers) meant the programme was not used consistently. As a result of these challenges, it was impossible to draw conclusions from statistical data or compare across samples.

However, from a qualitative perspective, the software did prove to be of value to radio stations: it enabled them to streamline their interaction process, dedicating a single number for feedback and avoiding the need for individual presenters to use personal phones to collect messages. It also provided a new means for audience interaction: Guinea, where there had previously been no texting-in option at the two stations, had the highest numbers of listeners choosing to contact the station by text message, showing the existence of an untapped market. The software also enabled the stations to permanently archive messages (where previously they were deleted from phones) for regular review of audience feedback.

## **Implications of Findings**

### *Listenership*

*Women were listening to radio, but radio stations were not listening to women.* Radio was failing to meet the needs of women in their communities despite a stated belief from radio station staff that they were capturing the interests and opinions of women. The overwhelming majority of radio staff was male (no station had more than two female presenters, most having only one, some with none). Women's broad range of concerns and interests, such as in economic self-sufficiency, were not sufficiently being taken into account in programming. Instead their interests were generally narrowly de-

defined as issues relating to children, housekeeping and their marriages. Yet, the results showed a significant demand for programming tailored to women's needs, including their political and economic participation in their communities. Furthermore, since women's programming was often considered a "token" measure, rather than as an intrinsically valuable tool to reach out to and engage the female half of the population, there were cases—as in Kindia, Guinea—where programming schedules were completely unsuited to the listening habits of the target group.

There are some basic measures that radio stations can take to improve on their responsiveness to women listeners, including programming adequate timeslots. Radio stations must take into account the listening habits of women when defining their program schedules if they truly intend to engage with female listeners. It is also important to diversify women's programming and not limit it to stereotypically feminine issues such as childcare or romance. Women have a vested interest in other issues, such as economics and politics, yet they are not being engaged on such programming sufficiently. These are also areas that are traditionally dominated by male voices and, indeed, the lack of adequate female voices and opinions on the radio contributes to the lack of women's engagement in such programming.

### *Participation*

*Women felt more empowered to participate when they heard other women on a public platform.* Research showed there are few women in radio (in some stations even the women's program was presented by a man). Women listeners stated that even the best-trained men could not transmit information on women's issues as well as a female presenter. Furthermore, it is not solely a question of bringing on board more female presenters, but also of soliciting the voices and opinions of a range of ordinary women during programmes. Radio sta-

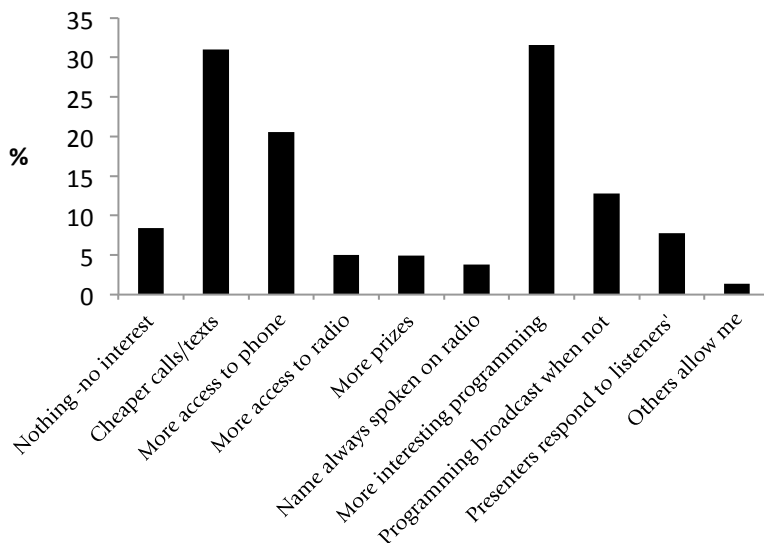


tions need to reach out to their community and enable even the most marginalised women to have a say. As the station manager in Mile 91, Sierra Leone, admitted, presenters who could not relate to the experiences of the most disadvantaged populations frequently gave advice that was not necessarily useful or relevant to their lives. One of the reasons their "Tata Su" program was so popular in rural areas around Mile 91 was that it gave a public voice to the most disadvantaged and vulnerable of women, allowing them to feel a sense of worth and belonging in their community.<sup>21</sup> In Mamou, Guinea, one female radio presenter had worked over several years to get more women's voices on air, going to markets and rural areas to interview ordinary women on their perspectives. As a result, most of the women interviewed in focus groups in this town (young, old, community leaders, market traders, fish vendors, tailors, etc.) had been to the rural radio station to talk about their various experiences. This contrasted starkly with focus groups in other communities where, though the participants had listened to the community radio for years, the vast majority outside of the 'community leader' group had never been invited to the station. Thus women found radio programming more encouraging and easier to relate to when they listened to other women, and not just professional female journalists or community elites.

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<sup>21</sup> Tata Su, produced by Radio Gbafth in Mile 91, Sierra Leone, is an original local language program, in which the presenter travels to rural settings to listen to people's requests and concerns and broadcasts messages and information to family members in other locations. As it takes the time to go into communities and talk to families, women are afforded a greater voice than in other programs.

**Figure 2: Suggestions by women to increase their interaction during radio programmes**



While those who called or texted during radio programming constituted a minority, women who did so because they felt they had something of value to contribute. Furthermore, those who did not participate very rarely cited cultural barriers that dictated they should remain quiet. The main inhibitors to interaction were that the radio stations were not engaging women in the most effective ways during programming, a lack of female voices on air, and material factors (lack of credit, phones, radios, etc.). Increased socio-economic development will contribute towards a greater trend for participation, by giving women both the confidence and tools necessary. As Figure 2 shows, there is significant scope for radio stations to take action to better engage women.

### *FrontlineSMS*

Text messaging technology is a useful alternative for listeners to participate in radio programmes, and particularly so for women, given that they tend to have more economic restrictions and texting is a cheaper option than calling. It also gives a degree of anonymity to those who want to talk about the sensitive issues that often concern women (rape, female genital mutilation, domestic violence, etc.), which are still controversial to speak publicly about. In sum, it allows those who are unwilling or unable to have their voices on air to nevertheless have their opinions heard.

Efforts to systematically use the advanced features of FrontlineSMS to encourage interaction and collect data were a failure due to a lack of technical proficiency and logistical issues outside of radio station staff control. Nonetheless, the adoption of this software (and the upcoming version specially tailored for radio use) is likely to produce benefits in the long term. In the short term, radio station staff noticed a marked improvement in the ability to choose and read text messages on the air, and appreciated the ability to store records of audience participation.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Despite certain cultural and socio-economic barriers, women are increasingly showing they have something important to contribute to the national discourse and to their local public sphere. Community radio is an important tool for this empowerment and has contributed to the education and development of women. But radio, community or otherwise, is still male-dominated and carries traditional social stereotypes. In addition, there appears to be a prevalent, self-serving assumption that if a radio station provides a women's program then it has somehow met women listeners' needs. Radio too often consigns women's programming to a narrow interpretation of gender issues including marriage, childcare or domestic responsibili-

ties. Women are usually viewed through a traditional model – in the context of their relationship to their husbands or children – and not as individual agents with a broad range of interests and needs.

It is still far from straightforward to get ordinary women to talk on the radio about their experiences, opinions and interests. This will not change without an increase in female radio presenters and contributors, which women cited as a main factor in their listening preferences.

For the latest generation of young women, it has become easier to overcome traditional cultural obstacles as well as to embrace the newest technologies that allow them access to a public platform. However, increasing participation hinges on opening up access to the radio for all age and social demographic groups. This can be done in a variety of ways, some of which have been tested and shown to be successful. In Liberia, the station's technical set-up shows that providing listeners with more and cheaper means of calling has a positive impact. In Mamou, the influence of a dedicated radio officer in actively recruiting more marginalised groups to participate has had significant results. The introduction of text messaging technology provides yet another alternative to communicate with radio stations.

Software programmes such as FrontlineSMS provide radio stations with new tools to improve audience participation. As a system of mass communication, FrontlineSMS gives radio stations direct access to a large database of repeat callers and texters, from which it can learn more about an audience's concerns, preferences and motivations. Over time, this will allow radio stations to develop more targeted programming, better attuned to the needs and interests of the community it aims to serve. Better knowledge of the audience is also crucial for radio stations, as it allows them to develop more intelligent business models. By capturing the interests of its listeners, they will be more able to tap into a larger source of revenue through deals with private companies, such as advertisers and phone net-

works. By promoting the use of texting technology, stations are simultaneously raising the profit of phone networks, and therefore have leverage to negotiate for service deals (such as free call-in lines) that can further encourage user interaction. Economically-speaking, the use of text messaging through technology such as FrontlineSMS is beneficial to listeners, radio stations and private companies.

In conclusion, the convergence between ICTs and traditional forms of communication has presented women with new opportunities for raising their public profile. However, while certain obstacles of cost and access to mobile phones can certainly be lessened due to ICT solutions, technology is not a panacea in and of itself. Community radio stations in West Africa have proven themselves to be agents of change in favour of peace and community cohesion; to continue this trend they must be active and deliberate in engaging all stakeholders, including women, in community development. The increasing convergence between radio and ICTs is a positive sign for women's empowerment, but needs further impetus from social institutions with the capacity to bring about or promote change. Community radio stations must now seize the initiative to develop programming that effectively incentivises women to engage, so as to maximise the potential of ICTs to improve the lot of women and hence of societies overall.

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# **Radio for Women's Development**

Examining the Relationship between Access and  
Impact

Oreoluwa Somolu

*Women's Technology Empowerment Centre (WTEC)*

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 *Ekuro 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.

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# Radio and Mobile Telephony

## The Gender Factor

Kennedy Kubuga, *BoldSteps Ghana*

The BoldSteps Foundation team<sup>23</sup> conducted a 12-month research project in Northern Ghana to tackle a number of key questions relating to the convergence of radio and mobile telephony and its potential impact on rural access, trends and development. Key thoughts and questions guiding the research included:

- Which of the newer information and communications technologies (ICTs) (mobile phones and Internet in this case) are more popular with various categories of radio listeners and radio content producers?
- What are the patterns of use among men and women?

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<sup>23</sup> The team was led by Kubuga Kennedy, mentored by Dr. Mary Myers and funded by the International Development Research Council (IDRC) through the Radio, Convergence and Development in Africa (RCDA) program.

- What are the factors that influence people's ability/willingness to contribute to radio content?
- What proportion of radio listeners, by age, sex, profession, place of residence and education, attempt to contribute to radio content?
- What channels are listeners most likely to use in contributing to radio content?

The research found that Northern Ghanaians are generally willing to contribute to radio content but are limited in doing so due to a number of factors, which will be explored below.

### **Introduction and Background**

Members of the BoldSteps research team have been working since 2008 in the field of ICTs for development, examining the impact of the use of newer ICTs in conjunction with traditional radio, with a focus on building the capacity of rural women to use ICTs, including radio. For example, in conjunction with the Association for Progressive Communication, the team created a 36-week platform for rural women entrepreneurs to share knowledge on best practices and critique some cultural practices on radio. Results affirmed that women were willing and able to contribute to radio when given the chance.

Jones and Siemering (2012) suggest the combination of the use of newer ICTs, such as the mobile phone and traditional radio, does have a positive impact for content producers and communities. But for the most part, the research does not originate from environments like the study area of this study, making it difficult to know if the findings would be applicable to this case. It is the hope of this author that the BoldSteps research will shed more light on developments around the convergence of mobile telephony and radio.

### **Literature Review**

This section attempts to review current thinking on the three-pronged issue of development, radio and mobile telephony. For the BoldSteps team, it was a welcome challenge to research this area in which very little literature exists that relates directly to our unit of analysis. One of the strongest indications of the impact of radio on development is the belief that the liberalization of the airwaves in Ghana amplified pro-democracy voices and sped up the return to constitutional rule in 1992 after almost 18 years of military rule (Center for Democracy and Development, 2000).

After the liberalization of the airwaves, some contend that differences in development in two otherwise similar and traditional areas in Ghana – Tamale and Bawku – could be attributed to the presence, or lack thereof, of radio. By most accounts, Tamale has enjoyed more economic progress and the conflict there seldom turns violent. Some social thinkers, like George Sidney Abugri (2010), attribute this to the huge presence of radio in Tamale and the virtual non-existence of radio in Bawku.

Taking as a given the acknowledged ability of radio to influence development, what is the likely impact when newer technology (such as mobile telephony) is introduced? In “Impact of New Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on Socio-economic and Educational Development of Africa and the Asia-Pacific,” Obijiofor and Inayatullah (2005) provide readers with a glimpse of the general idea of introducing new ICTs into traditional ways of doing things when they note that ICTs are “generally seen as the basic tool for survival in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” (p. 3).

In recent years, the use of the phone to complement the work of radio has become common practice in Ghana and has enabled a two-way dissemination of content in a process that allows listeners (content recipients) to contribute to content via SMS and phone-ins. This research considers this trend as the listening public takes advantage of the new phenomenon, and wishes to analyze usage dif-

ferences between men and women. The study will reveal whether or not the use of mobile telephony encourages contribution from listeners.

## **Methodology**

Given that the research had a particular interest in the perceptions and habits of rural women and girls, focus group discussions were planned during the research planning phase. However, focus groups proved unsuitable for work with peri-urban and urban dwellers. We therefore deployed questionnaires and conducted interviews with selected individuals to broaden the unit of analysis.

### *Focus group discussions*

Rural women entrepreneurs in Northern Ghana often form and join (development) associations with the primary aim of accessing funds, markets and best practices, information and knowledge. Due to these associations' previous engagements with community radio and technology, the research team sought to gain their input. Five women's groups in Pungu-Telania, Kasalingo, Navio, Gia and Biu, all located in the two districts of Kassena Nankana West and Kassena Nankana East, were purposively chosen for discussions. These discussions were conducted in Kassem and Nankani as most participants were better able to communicate and much more comfortable with the vernacular instead of the official language, English.

Because rural women entrepreneurs are often overlooked in questionnaires, focus group discussions were found to be ideal for collecting views and data from this segment of the population. In meeting with five of these women's groups, enumerators were able to collate the views of 76 women.



### *Questionnaire*

An English-language questionnaire was used to reach out to as many respondents as possible. Questionnaires were administered in and around Binaba, Bolgatanga, Bongo, Navrongo, Nyankpala, Paga, Sandema, Savelugu, Tamale and Zebilla in the two administrative Upper East and Northern regions. In all, 610 questionnaires were returned out of which 554 were valid for analysis. SPSS was then used to analyze the questionnaire results.

Enumerators chose to issue the questionnaires on normal working days to people they met on the streets who were willing to participate. These participants included shop owners, users of the nearest local Community Information Centre and, in the case of district capitals, local government workers. Respondents had the liberty to take the questionnaire to answer at their own pace and later contact enumerator via SMS upon completion of the questionnaire for pick-up. This method was especially utilized when enumerators handed out the questionnaires in office premises.

Respondents were chosen at random, although particular targets per location with regards to sex, age group and level of education were guiding factors. Enumerators talked to office holders, market women, way-side shop owners and people on the street. Of the 554 valid responses, 222 (or about 40 percent of respondents) were urban dwellers, the rest being rural dwellers. This distribution does not reflect the true population but was chosen to reflect our emphasis on input from rural dwellers, which would then be compared to that of the urban dwellers.

About 60 percent, or 331 of the valid questionnaires, were completed by male respondents. This was despite efforts by enumerators to obtain a 49:51 percentage ratio of males and females, respectively. The research team would later attempt to compensate for this gender imbalance through focus group discussions with women's groups within the catchment area of the research project.

### *Interviews*

Seven interviews were conducted, four of them with studio managers from the Nabiina Community Radio, Filla FM, Simli Radio and Bishara FM, and three with disc jockeys from five radio stations including the above-mentioned and A1 radio in Bolgatanga. The interviews were conducted in English and included sharing the results of the focus group discussions and partial results from the analysis of the questionnaires. The disc jockeys from Nabiina FM, Filla FM and Bishara FM were all female; the final interviewee was male. The selection of female DJs was deliberate as the research team sought to gain input from the content production side of the equation. The initial results of the interviews indicated a slight disconnect between the expectations of listeners and the work of radio content producers.

### **Results of Focus Group Discussions**

Enumerators met with five women's groups representing over 200 women. In total, 76 women were present at the focus group discussions, and most of them contributed to discussions. The investigating team was already familiar with these groups, as they had previously cooperated in projects, thus facilitating relaxed and informal conditions. Enumerators proposed a question or issue to the group for deliberations and opinions. When members had diverse views, a simple hand counting was carried out after facilitators and members had categorized these views. Counting was done for quantitative reasons but each 'opinion group' was asked to explain its stance.

Membership in these organized women's groups meant that the focus group participants resided in the location in question and were willing to pay dues to their organization. Most of these women were between 25 and 45 years old and the large majority (86 percent) was not formally employed. Only 11 of the participants, all of whom were teachers, had an education above secondary school. These 'educated' women were usually the secretaries of their respective groups.

Of the 76 women present during the five meetings only 19 (25 percent) owned a mobile phone. However, virtually all of the women had access to a mobile phone and could be easily reached on the mobile phone of a close relative or associate. Only two of the women said they had never used a mobile phone. The majority of the women, 58 percent, owned radio sets, and all said they had access to and were familiar with radio sets.

### *Discussions*

The key questions discussed bordered around:

- Does the use of telephony in conjunction with traditional radio encourage you to participate in radio discussion or content?
- Have you ever contributed content to any radio station? What kind of content did you contribute? By what means did you contribute?
- Do you believe your suggestions will be heard by the appropriate authorities if you make them via a radio station?

Portions of the focus meetings were recorded for transcription purposes. Participants of the discussions would usually refer to their personal experience in answering the questions. The research group observed that although virtually all the women in the meetings had access to mobile telephones, there was no correlation between this access and the use of the device to contribute to radio content. For example, of the 19 women who claimed to own at least one active mobile device, only two (11 percent) had contributed to radio discussions using the device. In contrast, 57.9 percent of respondents to the questionnaire claimed to have called into a radio station at least once. When the focus group discussants were asked why they were reluctant to call into radio stations, responses included:

“It’s too expensive even to make a call;”

“You have to wait in the queue for some time even after your call has been picked;”

"They are always talking politics or arguing about something irrelevant;" and

"I am not interested at all."

Most other responses touched on the issue of cost. One woman, however, recounted that she was finally able to get the Ghana Water and Sewerage Company to repair a broken pipeline in her area by calling in to complain during a radio breakfast show.

Generally, however, it was clear that participants were keen followers of radio discussions and would welcome the opportunity to participate in a discussion in the studio but for the issue of cost. Indeed, although women in the areas surveyed have been contributing to radio content, it is mostly done in person, when the opportunity to walk into radio stations arises.

*Do you believe the things you say on radio can influence policy?*

This topic generated debate in all situations. Some participants changed views as the debate went on but this report focuses on the number of votes before the debate took place. 43 women (57 per cent) said they believed in the ability of radio to influence policy.

Responses included:

... they know it is the messages they gave us on radio that made us vote for them so they cannot turn around and ignore what we say on radio;

"I don't believe the suggestions on radio are ever taken seriously by policymakers, otherwise we would have been far better off than we are now;"

"If we can occasionally collate views from listeners and studio panelists and give these views to the policy makers, radio will play an even more crucial role in our lives."

Enumerators could sense a general feeling amongst the discussants about the ability of radio to change policy, although the women themselves emphasized that currently this ability is not being taken advantage of.

*Context*

The focus group discussions were included because we envisaged the questionnaire would most likely leave out rural women entrepreneurs in the research area since they spend most of their productive time in crowded markets, on the farm or in their homes – locations that might compromise the quality of responses. Views and trends showed marked differences between the demographic groups captured by the two tools.

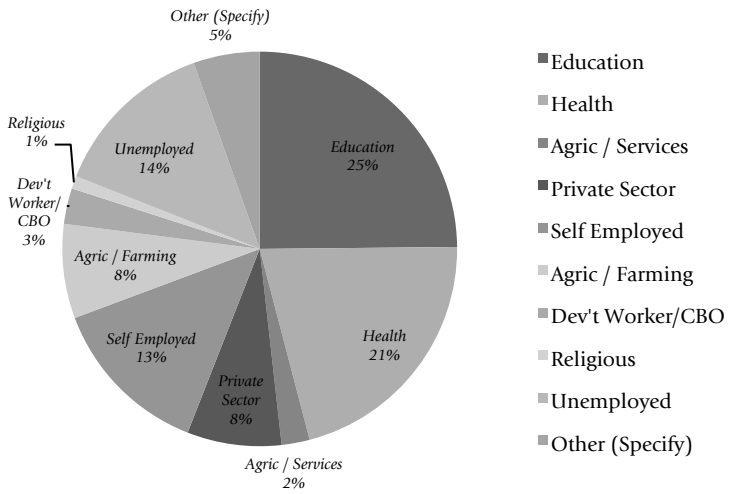
## **Results of the Questionnaire**

*Profile of respondents*

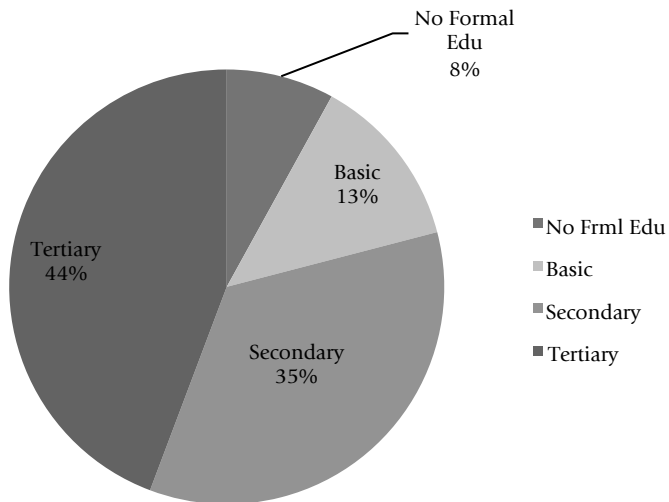
Of 554 individuals sampled, 221 were female, representing 40 percent. 331 male respondents represented the remaining 60 percent. Economic activities at the time of research, in addition to the specific need to administer questionnaires to individuals who owned mobile phones, contributed largely to this tilt. 119 respondents (24.8 percent of the sample) worked in the education sector, 101 (21.1 percent) in the health sector, 7.7 percent in the private sector and 13.4 percent responded that they were self-employed. Finally, 65 respondents, 11.7 percent, said they were unemployed. Some 5.4 percent of respondents were not classified by work.

The vast majority of respondents (92 percent) had at least some formal education, and respondents with some form of tertiary education accounted for the largest group, 44 percent of the sample. This distribution is likely influenced by the methodology used in capturing data. Using printed questionnaires to gather data meant that enumerators were more likely to get valid responses from people who could read and write. The majority of respondents to the questionnaire fell within the age group of 19-25.

**Figure 1: Distribution of respondents by occupation**



**Figure 2: Highest level of education**



*Using the mobile phone to contribute to radio content*

To explore respondents' habits in mobile phone usage, we specifically zeroed in on our interest area of radio content. The question "Have you ever called into a radio station?" was put to respondents. In response, 59.6 percent of male respondents and 53.8 percent of female respondents claimed to have called into a radio station at least once. And 15 percent of all respondents claimed to have called in several times.

The analysis by cross tabulation between the sexes and ability/willingness to contribute to radio content hints at a positive, though weak, relationship between the level of education of a woman and her ability/willingness to contribute to radio content by means of voice call or SMS. The tables and figures below illustrate the relationship between level of education and willingness/ability to call into a radio station to contribute to content.

The percentage of people who have never called into a radio station to contribute to content is lower among respondents with higher levels of education: 35.6 percent and 40.2 percent of respondents with minimum secondary and tertiary education, respectively. The figures for those who have never called a radio station are higher for those with basic or no formal education: 58.6 percent and 57.1 percent, respectively. Correlation tests performed by the research team confirmed a positive relationship between a respondent's level of education and his/her willingness/ability to contribute to radio content by way of calling into a radio station. The relationship is, however, weak.

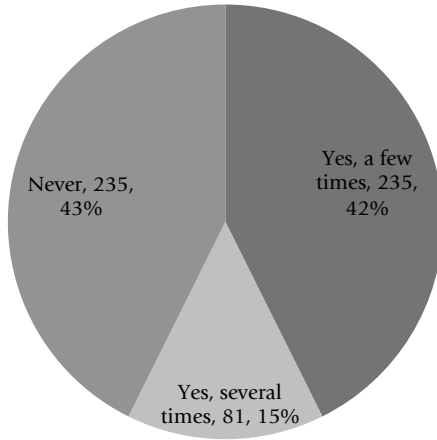
**Table 1: Content contribution habits and relationship to education***Have you ever called into a radio station?*

		Yes, sever- al times	Yes, a few times	Never	Total
<b>No Formal Education</b>	Count	8	10	25	43
	<i>% within No Formal Education</i>	18.6%	23.3%	58.1%	100.0 %
<b>Basic</b>	Count	6	24	41	71
	<i>% within Basic Education</i>	8.5%	33.8%	57.7%	100.0 %
<b>Secondary</b>	Count	31	92	68	191
	<i>% within Secondary Education</i>	16.2%	48.2%	35.6%	100.0 %
<b>Tertiary</b>	Count	36	108	97	241
	<i>% within Tertiary Education</i>	14.9%	44.8%	40.2%	100.0 %
<b>Total</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>546</b>



**Figure 3: Chart of respondents' previous efforts at contributing to radio content**

*Have you ever called in to a radio station?*



**Table 2: A cross tabulation of gender and content contribution**

		Yes, several times	Yes, a few times	Never	Total
<b>Male</b>	Count	52	145	133	330
	% within Male/Female	15.8%	43.9%	40.3%	100.0%
<b>Female</b>	Count	29	89	101	219
	% within Male/Female	13.2%	40.6%	46.1%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	Count	81	234	234	549
	% within Male/Female	14.8%	42.6%	42.6%	100.0%

Marginal differences between men and women appear when it comes to attempts at contributing to radio content. Table 2, for example, shows that 46.1 percent of females have never contributed to radio content by way of calling in to a radio station; the percentage is lower (at 40.3 percent) among males.

To determine whether any gender differences existed, the team cross-tabulated the factors. The results are listed in Table 3. While Table 1 indicates that those with a higher education tend to contribute more to radio content, the more focused investigation of possible gender disparities (Table 3) illustrates the habits of both men and women separately as they progress up the educational ladder.

**Table 3: The influence of formal education on the individual's efforts to contribute to radio content**

*Level of Education, Gender and Contribution to Radio Content*

Highest Level Of Education			Have you ever called a radio station			
			Yes (several times)	Yes (few times)	Never	Total
<b>No Formal Education</b>	Male	Count	2	5	11	18
		% within Male/Female	11.1%	27.8%	61.1%	100.0%
	Female	Count	6	5	13	24
% within Male/Female		25.0%	20.8%	54.2%	100.0%	
Total	Count	8	10	24	42	
	% within Male/Female	19.0%	23.8%	57.1%	100.0%	
<b>Basic</b>	Male	Count	2	16	25	43
		% within Male/Female	4.7%	37.2%	58.1%	100.0%
	Female	Count	4	7	16	27
% within Male/Female		14.8%	25.9%	59.3%	100.0%	
Total	Count	6	23	41	70	
	% within Male/Female	8.6%	32.9%	58.6%	100.0%	
<b>Secondary</b>	Male	Count	17	50	34	101
		% within Male/Female	16.8%	49.5%	33.7%	100.0%
	Female	Count	14	42	34	90
% within Male/Female		15.6%	46.7%	37.8%	100.0%	
Total	Count	31	92	68	191	
	% within Male/Female	16.2%	48.2%	35.6%	100.0%	
<b>Tertiary</b>	Male	Count	31	74	61	166
		% within Male/Female	18.7%	44.6%	36.7%	100.0%
	Female	Count	5	34	36	75
% within Male/Female		6.7%	45.3%	48.0%	100.0%	
Total	Count	36	108	97	241	
	% within Male/Female	14.9%	44.8%	40.2%	100.0%	

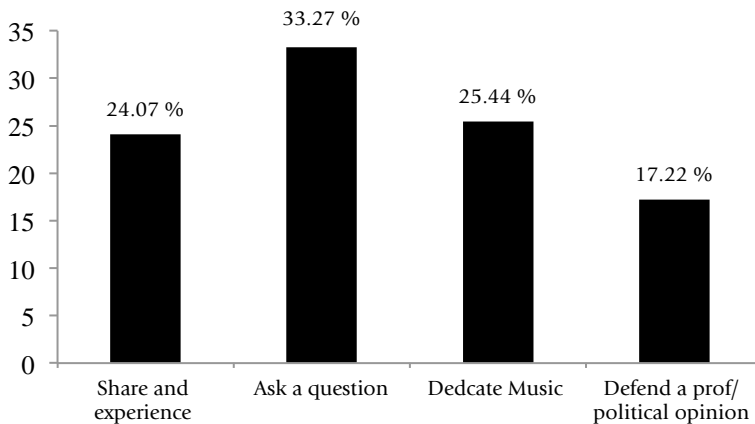
Noticeable in the cross tabulation of Table 3 is that as a man gains higher education, he becomes more likely to want to contribute to radio content. However, this rule does not apply to female respondents, as there is no significant relationship between their level of education and content contribution habits. We can thus conclude that women are more willing to share knowledge via radio, and in their case formal education is not a barrier to this activity. The real barrier for women is therefore most likely an issue of cultural practice/position, or, relatedly, confidence.

*What motivates people to call into radio stations?*

Before distributing questionnaires, the team, based on observation of the airwaves, categorized thematic areas for respondents in an attempt to obtain a verifiable answer to the above question. Figure 4 illustrates the responses from respondents.

**Figure 4: The influence of formal education on the individual's efforts to contribute to radio content**

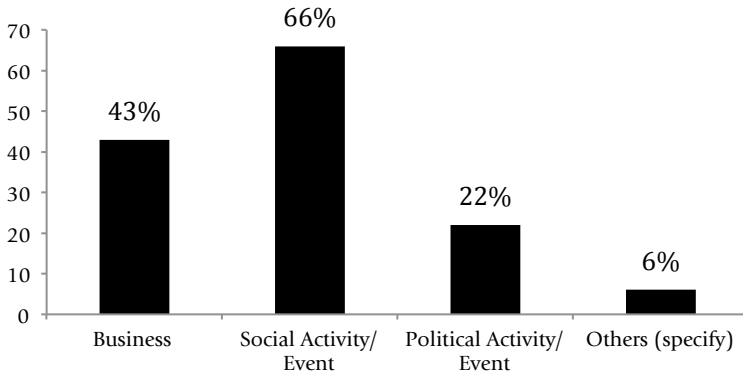
*Which of these would most encourage you to call into a radio station?*



Over a third (33.27 percent) of the persons who claimed to have called into a radio station at least once said their primary reason for calling was to ask a question on specific topics, while 17.22 percent of respondents stated that they did so to defend a political or professional position. However, observation of the air waves showed in general a 2:1 ratio of the number of calls received during radio programmes to the number of calls received during a particular question and answer program on market access. This is notwithstanding the fact that the observation was done in Navrongo, a largely agricultural community. If fewer people called in during political discussions yet more calls came in during such programmes, it is probable that it is the same people expressing interest in such political discussions. The suggestion to radio station owners and workers would be to diversify the topics discussed on air. Observation reveals that virtually all radio stations, including those not covered in this document, include a heavy dose of political content. Yet the revelation is that these programmes serve a few over-zealous listeners.

*Using radio to promote activities and interests*

Just about a quarter (24.2 percent) of respondents reported that they have used radio to promote their business through advertisements. Two out of every three (66 percent) had done so to promote a social event or activity.

**Figure 5: Activities mostly promoted via radio***Do you believe radio can influence policy in Ghana?*

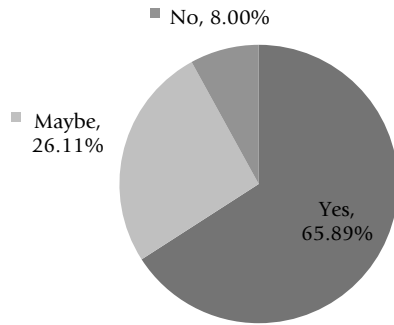
A key question investigated perceptions about whether or not radio can influence policy.

An overwhelming 66 percent of the respondents indicated a belief in the power of radio to influence policy with only 8 percent of respondents indicating they did not believe radio had any power to influence public policy. This is not significantly different from the responses to the same question during the focus group discussions wherein more than half (57 percent) of respondents shared firm belief in the power of radio to influence policy.

The team of researchers hypothesized that the level of education of an individual had a bearing on his/her belief in the power of radio to influence policy. A cross tabulation of educational level against this belief produced the table below.

**Table 6: Public perception of the power of radio to influence policy**

*Can radio influence public policy?*



**Table 4: Perception of power of amongst people of different education backgrounds**

*Do you believe radio can influence policy change in Ghana?*

Highest Level of Education		Yes, very well	Maybe	No	Total
<b>No Formal Education</b>	Count	30	6	3	44
	% within No Formal Education	68.2%	13.6%	6.8%	100.0%
<b>Basic</b>	Count	30	21	10	71
	% within Basic Education	42.3%	29.6%	14.1%	100.0%
<b>Secondary</b>	Count	103	39	13	191
	% with Secondary Education	53.9%	20.4%	6.8%	100.0%
<b>Tertiary</b>	Count	149	55	11	243
	% within Tertiary Education	61.3%	22.6%	4.5%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	Count	312	121	37	549
	%	56.8%	22.0%	6.7%	100.0%

A closer look at Table 4 shows for example that only 6.8 percent of respondents without any formal education thought radio had no possible influence on policy, lower than that for respondents with basic education. The trend, however, showed a positive decline among those with formal education as the percentage of respondents answering in the negative to the question was 14.1 percent, 6.8 percent and 4.5 percent among respondents with basic, secondary and tertiary education, respectively, perhaps suggesting that the more educated a person is, the more likely he is to believe in the power of radio to influence policy.

*What should be done to improve the quality of radio content?*

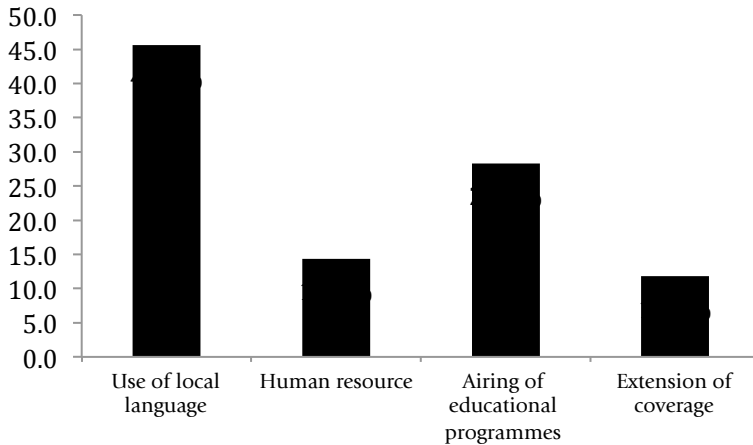
Clearly dominant in the views of respondents was the issue of local content and local language usage. Nearly every other respondent (45.6 percent) suggested an increased use of the local language of the immediate catchment of the radio station. In Ghana, 46 languages are spoken nationwide with some four – Twi, Ga, Ewe and Dagbani – dominating in overlapping parts of the country. As a result, there is a tendency for radio stations to concentrate on the ‘dominant languages’ in place of the actual local language of the area.

Other issues raised by respondents touched on human resources, particularly DJs at the various radio stations, airing of educational programmes and extension of radio coverage (technology), among other issues. Figure 7 groups the responses into four areas of concern and indicates the percentage of respondents who highlighted such issues.



**Figure 7: Areas of operation most in need of attention at local FM stations**

*What should be improved to improve overall quality of radio programmes?*



### **Summary of Findings**

- Rural women entrepreneurs have almost equal access<sup>24</sup> to radio and mobile telephony as any other demographic group.
- Rural women tend to receive information only from radio and for the most part do not contribute to radio content (11 percent compared to 57.9 percent of other respondents).
- Rural respondents tend to depend more on radio for news and education (85 percent) than female urban dwellers (55 percent).
- The main cause of this observed difference in interaction with radio stations is attributable to prohibitive mobile phone talk costs and, to some degree, lack of education.

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<sup>24</sup> Access being defined as the ability to make use of the device at negligible inconvenience.

- Women in surveyed rural communities are very much convinced they have the opportunity to influence policy by contributing to radio content.
- The higher the educational level of a girl/woman, the more likely she is to contribute to radio content. This trend, however, is not displayed among men and boys, whose level of education shows no correlation with their willingness/ability to contribute to radio content.
- Other ways of contributing to radio content, such as advertisements, are clearly dominated by men.
- One in three young people who call into radio stations in these sample areas in Northern Ghana do so to ask a question.

### **Implications of Findings**

As noted throughout the study, rural women have almost equal access to radio as urban dwellers but contribute less content to radio. On the receiving end, urban dwellers depend less on radio for education and news. The implication is that, with radio's power to influence policy, urban dwellers are much more likely to impact the political sphere and, indeed, radio content. This is subtly relegating rural dwellers to the position of second hand users of information.

The observation that boys and men call radio stations irrespective of their level of education, whereas more educated women and girls are more likely to contribute to radio content, may reflect a cultural tendency to diminish the voices of women.

About a third of the population that has called into a radio station claims to have done so to ask a question or seek new knowledge. This indicates the power of radio when it comes to knowledge-sharing and public education. Northern Ghanaians look to radio as a source of knowledge and information, especially in rural areas. Unfortunately, most of the radio stations examined in the rural areas act as 'sister stations' to radio stations located in urban

areas. The practice is for rural radio stations to broadcast news items carried by bigger FM stations located in urban areas at prime time and then broadcast actual local content at other times.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Considering the above observations regarding the flow of radio content, the BoldSteps team has suggested to local policy makers and advocates that they consider engaging the nearest offices of mobile telecom providers to urge them to supply toll free lines to community FM stations. Radio stations are also encouraged to air more discussion programmes aimed at educating the public. As noted above, although beyond the scope of the research, the organization of more programmes and projects which aim at boosting the willingness/ability of women to contribute to radio media is highly recommended.

Considering the size of the population that has called into a radio program to ask a question, the author recommends that radio stations be encouraged to build the capacity of presenters or employ better skilled personnel in a bid to facilitate more productive discussions and programming over the airwaves.

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# **Impact of an SMS- Augmented Participatory Radio Campaign (PRC) in Atanga Sub-County of Northern Uganda**

Naomi Ayot Oyaro and Farm Radio International

The Canada-Africa Partnership on AIDS Uganda (CAP-AIDS Uganda) partnered with the radio station Mega FM-Gulu to pioneer an approach to behaviour change communication in the field of public health. The partnership took place in Atanga county of Gulu.

Through a participatory communication model developed by Farm Radio International in the field of agricultural extension, CAP-AIDS conducted a research program to see whether or not the Participatory Radio Campaign (PRC) could improve the willingness of people in

HIV-stricken communities to come forward for voluntary counselling and testing (VCT), despite powerful stigmas and cultural taboos.

The PRC is an approach to behaviour change communication that uses radio along with modern information and communication technologies (ICTs), and involves the beneficiaries of the campaigns in the planning and evaluation of the radio campaign. Farm Radio International has demonstrated significant increases in the uptake of various agricultural techniques through behaviour change communication. The research explored whether these successes could be matched in the fight to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS in Northern Uganda and also whether the additional use of SMS alerts could augment the impact of the campaign. The aim was to establish the extent to which the use of ICTs impacted the participatory radio strategies to encourage VCT-Health-Seeking-Behaviour within the highly vulnerable Acholi sub-region of Northern Uganda.

## **Background**

Information dissemination is essential for addressing public health crises. In the ongoing battle against HIV/AIDS, mass communication campaigns have proven to be significant in altering perceptions of the disease and improving health-seeking behaviours. Further, involving people in meaningful and participatory communication based on dialogue, listening, and responding to expressed information needs, has greater success than standard one-way flows of information. Interaction from listeners and meaningful participation of different stakeholders is at the heart of the participatory radio campaign, or PRC. The study team worked from the assumption that the PRC, when combined with new two-way ICTs like mobile phone platforms and SMS, would have greater reach and encourage participation and improve knowledge uptake of the messages. This approach was used to encourage voluntary counselling and testing in the HIV/AIDS-stricken region of Northern Uganda, where strong

stigmas related to VCT prevent many people from receiving HIV positive diagnosis and starting treatment. It was concluded that adding the use of SMS to the radio campaign led to an increased number of clients going to local health facilities for VCT service. Indeed, the messages may have been so successful that the lack, or sometimes the complete unavailability, of the testing kits sometimes led to disruption and discouragement of the targeted audience.

Farm Radio developed its PRC-model by informing and engaging smallholder farmers for the uptake of knowledge in the agriculture sector by using new and innovative technologies. This case study provides empirical evidence that PRC and SMS can also have a positive developmental impact in the realm of HIV/AIDS prevention.

### **HIV/AIDS Problem in the Case Study Area**

HIV and AIDS remain one of the biggest challenges facing post-conflict communities across Uganda and, in particular, Northern Uganda. The Acholi region, which is in a post-conflict situation and has many camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), is characterized by a predominance of the commercial sex trade and limited access to HIV prevention services, despite the high risk of exposure. CAP-AIDS acknowledges the importance of disseminating information using mass communication methods, and it is opportune that Uganda has radio stations in both urban and rural areas. Mobile phone penetration is also high. It is estimated that by 2013 Uganda will have over 75 percent mobile phone penetration. The PRC research undertaken by CAP-AIDS in Uganda sought to investigate the impact of the convergence of radio with SMS on VCT-seeking behaviour to stem the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The research further sought to promote ultimate health benefits to communities through communication.

### **PRC-Research Objectives**

The main objective of this study was to explore how and to what extent ICT-enhanced participatory radio strategies could contribute to the success of HIV/AIDS prevention initiatives, specifically VCT, within the highly vulnerable Acholi sub region of Northern Uganda. The specific objectives were:

1. To design and implement an action research plan to determine the potential of participatory radio campaigns in promoting VCT in the Acholi sub region of Uganda; and
2. To assess the role of SMS messaging to enhance the reach, inter-activity, and effectiveness of participatory radio strategies.

### **PRC Approach**

Through the African Farm Radio Research Initiative (AFRRI), Farm Radio International pioneered a development communication approach that focused on helping smallholder farmers in Africa to learn about, discuss, evaluate, and adopt a range of agricultural practices to improve their lives and their livelihoods. The research findings indicate that farmers who reside in communities reached by the PRC are five times more likely to adopt improved agricultural practices compared to those farmers who reside in communities not yet reached by the PRC. These PRC initiatives go far beyond the traditional management of the packaged information routinely disseminated by government agencies, international organizations or NGOs. PRC initiatives reach the wider public, and encourage feedback and participation of the beneficiaries in the planning and design of the radio campaign.

PRC has the following six characteristics:

1. Ensures the participation of farmers and broadcasters in all stages of the campaign.
2. Features the voices of farmers.



3. Gathers continuous feedback from listeners.
4. Engages and entertains listeners using a variety of effective radio formats.
5. Uses a “core story” to provide a common thread by the campaign, keeping it focused and engaging.
6. Builds a dramatic “arc” through the program.

The Participatory Radio Campaign model was found effective for informing and engaging smallholder farmers towards improving the level of uptake of agricultural practices and innovations.

### **PRC-Design for HIV/AIDS VCT Uptake**

A group of stakeholders were consulted during the formative stage of designing the HIV/AIDS campaign to ensure the programs broadcast on Mega FM in Gulu were accurate and culturally appropriate. Baseline surveys were conducted to understand the attitudes and beliefs of the community in Atanga towards HIV/AIDS. Consultative meetings were also held with Atanga Health Centre Facility staff to agree on: (a) how the preliminary surveys could be integrated into the actual health centre activities; and (b) the specific responsibilities to be borne by the different stakeholders. Accordingly, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was drafted clarifying the agreements made between stakeholders and identifying the roles each would play.

### **Data Interpretation and Analysis of VCT Messaging Uptake**

The quantitative data analysis is mainly based on the actual VCT attendance trends and patterns within the study site selected for this particular assessment. Data was collected from the VCT laboratory registers. The final analysis compared VCT attendance at three time periods: prior to the PRC, during the radio campaign alone, and

when SMS features used to remind listeners of the program time and themes were added to the PRC. The trends and patterns of the VCT uptake were analysed to establish the influence of radio and new ICTs on VCT uptake. The rates of VCT attendance were compared with those in a control community. The control community did not receive either SMS-texting or the PRC radio broadcasts, but was involved in other VCT uptake activities. This arrangement helped the study team to make a comparison on the VCT-uptake, specifically focusing on the impact of the radio campaign and the radio campaign when combined with SMS.

The research team was aware of the challenges of availability of staff and testing kits at the health facility in Atanga. Prior arrangements by the research team ensured that testing kits would be in steady supply in order to avoid disruption of the campaign outcomes. A meeting with key HIV and AIDS service providers ensured that commitments were secured for the supply of HIV testing kits.

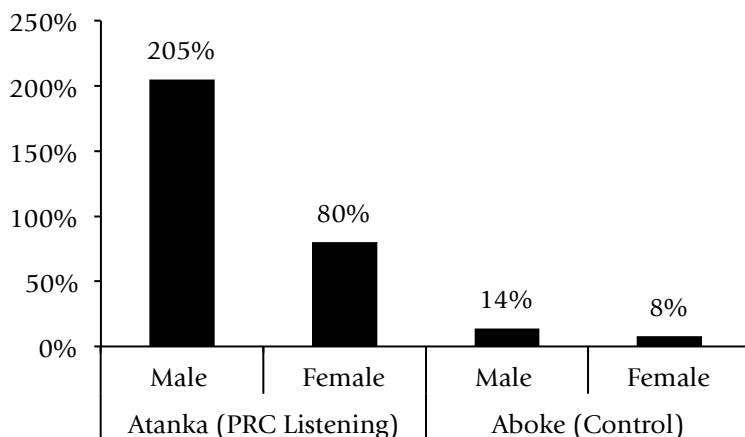
### **PRC Project Outcomes**

The pilot study found that the PRC model, which uses radio broadcasts and SMS messaging, can have a strong influence on VCT seeking behaviour. Notwithstanding the degree of success, Short Messaging Services (SMS) may not be appropriate for those who are illiterate as it can negatively affect the intended outcomes of the SMS alerts. However, the problem of non-literate audiences being unable to decipher the content sent inside the SMS text could be mitigated by radio broadcasters through skilful relaying of the messages in the vernacular.

As shown in Figure 1 below, there were marked increases in VCT uptake among men and women after the PRC. Before the introduction of the PRC in Atanga-sub-county, 153 males went for VCT over a four-month period from February through May 2010. After the PRC, during a four months period from December 2010 through

March 2011, 466 went for VCT. This is a 205 percent increase in testing levels among men. On the other hand, 454 women went for testing from February through May 2010 (before the PRC). The number of women who went for testing increased to 819 for the period December 2010 through March 2011. This represents an 80 percent increase in the incidence of testing. In comparison, the increase in the “control” sub-county – Aboke – was much less, though significant in scale: a 14 percent increase among males and an 8 percent increase among females. This suggests that the PRC was not the only factor that accounts for the increase.

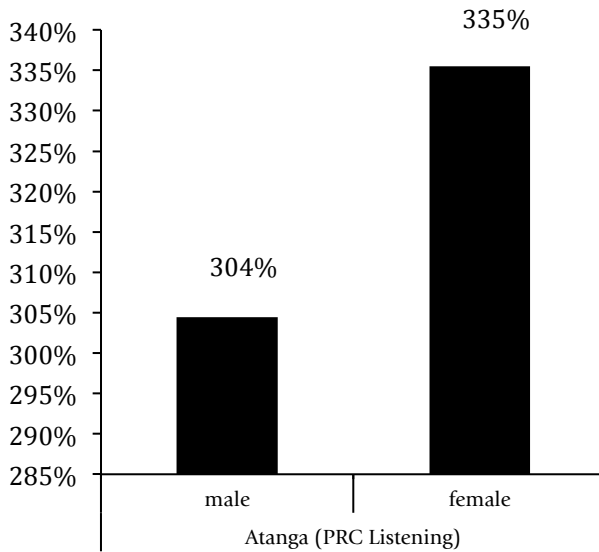
**Figure 1: Percent Difference in VCT Uptake Between Feb-May 2010 and December-March 2011 after PRC Began**



Comparing VCT uptake after the SMS was introduced (Figure 2) provides further insights. For the three-month period from April to June 2011, two hundred seventy-five (275) males came for testing compared to a mere 68 males who came for testing during the same time frame in April through June of 2010. This is an increase of 304 percent, significantly more than the increase attributed to the messages in the “PRC only” period. Among females, a remarkable 614 came for testing in April through June of 2011 compared to only 141 females from April through June of 2010. This suggests that adding

SMS to augment the radio campaign could also have a bigger impact on females.

**Figure 2: Percent Difference in VCT Uptake between April-June 2010 and April-June 2011 with Radio Plus SMS**



Among the control group in Aboke, a total of 1,536 clients (449 male and 1,087 female) accessed VCT services over a period of eight months. When the control group figures are compared with results in Atanga, it is clear that the radio campaign significantly contributed to the uptake of VCT services.

The results of this preliminary study show that the PRC, by using radio as its medium, has had significant impact on the general public. It specifically influenced behavioural change towards VCT in Atanga Sub-County in Pader District. In Aboke Sub-County (the control community), where people do not receive the Mega FM radio

broadcasts, the level of attendance by clients turning up for VCT remained steady. Perhaps this can be attributed to the relatively high population in Aboke as compared to Atanga.

The findings are clear that radios, combined with SMS through mobile phones, are powerful tools for encouraging VCT seeking behaviour. Involvement of all stakeholders is an essential component for harnessing synergies in the campaign. The PRC design ensured that all stakeholders understand PRC and its role in influencing VCT seeking behaviour, which resulted in securing their full support for the campaign.

The PRC process has helped strengthen the capacity of Mega FM stations in the production, exchange and dissemination of quality HIV and AIDS radio programs to better inform rural communities about the benefit of VCT. Mega FM has given voice to those living with HIV by incorporating testimonies and interactive talk shows to encourage listenership of the HIV/AIDS programs. Different stakeholders in HIV and AIDS also contributed to the talk shows, increasing the reliability of the information, and enhancing the level of trust listeners felt in the programs. Some of the AIDS service actors who participated in the episodes broadcast by Mega FM include: Lacor Hospital HIV and AIDS Focal Person; Gulu Youth Centre HIV and AIDS officer; Walokokwo AIDS support Centre; TASO Gulu and people living with AIDS (PLWAs).

However, sustainability challenges remain. These include a limited supply of testing kits, which are supplied by the district level Ministry of Health. Personnel at the health centres have expressed concern about stock shortages of Septrin used in the prophylaxis treatment of the clients. Based on the experiences and lessons documented by Farm Radio, PRC can stimulate demand and testing supplies need to be well stocked to meet this demand.

## **Conclusion**

When ICTs are properly utilized, a critical mass of people could be reached. However, it is important to ensure the messaging is targeted and accurate, and takes into account local customs, attitudes and stigmas. Ensuring that all beneficiaries have confidence in the information being disseminated is key to influencing HIV and AIDS related behaviours. This preliminary study has demonstrated that trustworthiness among the beneficiary communities can be achieved through proper PRC design and SMS-messaging and by including subject matter specialists in the PRC design.

While information is essential for addressing public health crises, it cannot work in isolation. Involving people in meaningful participatory communication approaches based on dialogue, listening, responding to expressed information and other needs is essential. Interaction and meaningful participation of the different stakeholders in the design of the radio campaign helped to dispel fears and encourage the target audience to seek VCT services.

The experience of Farm Radio with the Participatory Radio Campaign (PRC) model has proven to be an effective way to inform and engage smallholder farmers for the uptake of new and innovative technologies that lead to improvement of their livelihoods. In this research, the PRC model has also proven that radio and SMS can have strong influence on VCT seeking behaviour, especially with a rural audience. Notwithstanding the degree of success, Short Messaging Services may not be appropriate especially with those who are illiterate. This can affect the intended outcomes of the SMS alerts. Further, this preliminary study shows positive outcomes as evidenced through PRCs that create a significant impact on the demand for VCT services. The additional use of SMS significantly amplifies this impact as well. However, this was one study conducted with one station. Knowing that ICTs have proliferated in both urban and rural settings, further research and replication of the PRC model for VCT

health seeking behaviour needs to be conducted on a wider scale to confirm the positive impact.

The study has provided evidence on the contribution of health communication strategies to effective HIV prevention strategy. This factor should underpin strengthening of targeted strategies for health communication. Effective HIV/AIDS response is affected by a number of factors and requires a multi-sector approach for attaining the desired results and after for stemming the pandemic. Individual testimonies and amplifying voices over the air are beneficial to prevention and care interventions. Stimulating public and policy debate through innovative communication approaches will further influence the collective and individual participation, ownership, and accountability of community members. In this regard, the research findings contribute to evidence-based decision-making processes pertinent to determining communication approaches, budgets and strategies in the health sector, specifically for addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic.







# **Radio Trottoir and Political Communication in Ethiopia**

Elizabeth Demissie Dadi

This submission is based on research conducted by Ethiopian researcher Elizabeth Demissie Dadi through the Radio, Convergence and Development in Africa program. Her work has been edited and condensed for use here as a research field note.

One of the most interesting recent intersections of “radio” and Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Africa does not involve real radio at all, but rather so-called ‘radio trottoir’ or ‘sidewalk radio,’ and its nexus with Bluetooth technology and other ICTs used to pass messages in the fraught political context of Ethiopia. This research draws on qualitative interviews and participant observation to explore radio trottoir as an alternative forum for criticism of the government and political actors in Ethiopia between 2005 and 2010. Radio trottoir or sidewalk radio is the use of humorous tales, folk music, poems, graffiti, gossip and other verbal genres transmitted through word of mouth, distribution of underground cassettes, SMS or Bluetooth and infrared features of mobile

phones<sup>25</sup>(Spitulnik, 2002; Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1997).

For this study, 32 informants were interviewed in four cities – Addis Ababa, Gonder, Bahir Dar and Hawassa. Snowball sampling was used in selecting the interviewees, and to provide more context to the interviews, participant observation techniques were employed. Direct observations of the use of radio trottoir in the political context were made in many social gatherings such as the 2010 Ethiopian Great Run and football matches in villages. This technique allowed for a greater understanding of messages and information that were disseminated through radio trottoir within the socio-political contexts. Generally, it was found that radio trottoir in Ethiopia helps communicators exchange information, reflect opinion on politics, comment on, criticize and challenge the system. Moreover, this researcher observed interesting intersections between radio trottoir and ICTs such as Bluetooth and SMS.

## **Introduction**

To understand any political communication one must consider multiple dimensions like culture, politics, economy, and technology (Hyden and Leslie, 2002, p. 2). As Graber (2004, p. 45) contends, contextual factors make for differentiations in political communication across environments. As such, political communication studies must begin with observing how people are communicating in their own situated context, so as to come up with appropriate analysis. This study set out to conduct such contextual research in Ethiopia by looking at radio trottoir communication about politics.

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<sup>25</sup> Bluetooth and infrared are mobile phone features that enable the wireless transfer of data from one phone to another in the 2.4 GHz unlicensed band when the phones are physically proximate to each other. These features cover a distance range of 10-100 meters ([www.TechTerms.com](http://www.TechTerms.com)).

While every context is different, it is important to note that in many African contexts, different forms of so-called radio trottoir can play a more significant role in political communication than the mainstream media, which might not hold true for Western societies (Hyden and Leslie, 2002, p. 24; Spitulnik, 2002). This characteristic emanates from the dominance of oral tradition and the relative weakness of formal media institutions in the continent. In Ethiopia, conventional radio has not played a significant role in the political arena for several reasons. For one, there are relatively few radio stations and those that do exist are either government-owned or do not engage in political discussions because of systematic state suppression (Aadland and Fackler, 2009). Until recently, independent broadcast media were prohibited in the country. In the last few years a handful of private FM and community radio stations were given permission to broadcast, mainly on social issues. However, politics is still virtually off limits for non-government radio transmissions. The government-owned stations, conversely, are advocates of ruling party politics. Consequently, most political discussions on radio are either artificial or unrepresentative of much of society. To deal with such communication gaps, some scholars (Spitulnick, 2002) suggest looking at radio trottoir as the public sphere. Accordingly, this study explores this important sphere, which can be considered as a participatory and representative form of media (Spitulnick, 2002, p.180; Fekade, 2006, p.149).

Many scholars (Fekade, 2006; Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1997; Spitulnik, 2002; Hyden and Leslie, 2002; Graber, 2000) agree on the potential of radio trottoir to mediate political discussions in contemporary Africa. Some even suggest that a close examination of radio trottoir messaging could provide insights into future developments. As Graber (2004) states, "If the political climates were known, one could forecast political developments in the nation" (p. 56). And yet, the role of radio trottoir in political communication is relatively under-researched (Spitulnik, 2002;Hyden

and Leslie, 2002; Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1997). In Ethiopia, the area is almost untouched.

### **Literature Review**

Radio trottoir or sidewalk radio is an informal communication media which appears in both traditional and modern modes of communication. These modes of communication include humorous tales, folk music, poems, graffiti, gossip and other verbal genres that are transmitted through word of mouth, distribution of underground cassettes, web pages, SMS and Bluetooth and infrared features of mobile phones<sup>26</sup> (Spitulnik, 2002; Sreberny-Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 1997). Established networks like neighborhoods, friendships, workplace relationships and religious spheres are often utilized as the sites of production and distribution. Due to multiple sites of production and distribution, the information flow in radio trottoir is multi-directional and participatory political communication (Spitulnick, 2002:201). Scholars (such as Spitulnik, 2002; Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, 1997; Finnegan, 1970) have argued that radio trottoir is a cultural form of radio in 'illiterate' societies where oral communication is dominant. As Lent (1987, p.146) describes, radio trottoir (he calls it folk media<sup>27</sup>) is more or less media of the masses and relished by different age groups.

Radio trottoir is often used to reject and resist the oppressive discourse and power in society. In other words, it is a platform for anti-hegemonic discourse and political mobilization from the bottom up. For example, during the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, some political protests were expressed through various forms

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<sup>27</sup> Radio trottoir has also been described in the scholarly literature as a form of alternative media, informal media, small media, minor media, personal media, popular media, and community media (Spitulnik, 2002, p. 200).

of radio trottoir. In particular, cultural songs and religious verses were widely used (Finnegan, 1970). Similarly, through songs, the leaders of the Mau Mau movement in Kenya were able to widely mobilize the masses for their cause, in spite of the government's official ban of the movement. The innocuous nature of radio trottoir communication, as Finnegan (1970) argues, gave it an advantage over other formal media for political mobilization and communication.

In Ethiopia, radio trottoir is a space that serves to express what cannot be said directly about the political system. Thus, it is a public arena that citizens use to exchange information, comment and criticism, and to mobilize the masses (Fekade, 2006, p. 149). Since the mode of communication favours interpersonal and cultural forms, it is a highly valued method of political communication. Some of Ethiopia's former emperors recognized the potential of this sphere for taking the pulse of popular feeling on the political and economic affairs of the nation. As Fekade (2006) describes, leaders asked what had been communicated over radio trottoir by saying, "‘irräññaminalä?' (meaning, "what do shepherds say?")" (p. 149). In the ancient Ethiopian tradition, it was believed that the shepherds' songs were an accurate expression of community views. As a result, many of these leaders gauged public opinion through radio trottoir and used those insights to shape the political system.

### **Data collection**

For this study, data was collected from individuals who live in Addis Ababa, Gonder, Bahir Dar and Hawassa, and who have been using radio trottoir for political communication. Addis Ababa, the capital, was selected by purposive sampling because participants there generally come from all corners of the country and thus represent a diversity of opinions and views. Gonder, Bahir Dar and Hawassa cities were included by lottery sampling to represent other regions of the

country. In all, 32 key informants were selected through snowball and availability sampling. The sampling methods were chosen because radio trottoir communications are not open to just anyone. Therefore, to unveil what has been going on, when using personal networks and key persons who are perceived as 'insiders' to be linked with other participants of the communication, availability and snowball sampling were of paramount importance. It was important to incorporate various voices in this study. To this effect, based on availability, selection of respondents was done in a way that would include people from diverse age groups, sex and educational background.

For the sake of having available data, the research was limited to collecting messages in the forms of jokes, folk music, puns, and oral poems. Among these, messages in electronic form were exchanged by mobile phones users through their Bluetooth, infrared and short text messages (SMS) were collected. In addition, messages communicated or performed in oral and written forms in different gatherings and public squares were collected through participant observation and interviews.

To understand the messages and the purposes of communication within their own social and communicative contexts, direct observation was undertaken at social gatherings where data collection was possible. In this regard, the 2010 Ethiopian Great Run, football fields in different villages, and friendly gatherings in local refreshment centers such as cultural houses, cafes and tearooms, were found to be convenient and safe settings for data collection in all cities. Many jokes and folk poems were thus collected with participant observation. With the consent of informants, note-taking was utilized as anonymous informants did not allow the recording of their voices for safety reasons.

To collect some political messages and have a clear understanding of how and why they are communicated, interviews were employed. Informants who were engaged in informal conversations

during the above mentioned occasions were asked about the purposes of their communication and contextual meanings of the political messages expressed in the jokes, songs and oral poetry communicated therein. In addition, information about the sources of the messages, the channels and networks were collected via interviews on several occasions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Radio trottoir is an indirect means of communicating with someone in power. These communications often involve sensitive political content communicated covertly and within closely-related social groups and networks of trust. In such situations, to access information one has to win the consent and confidence of the communicators. Care must be taken when securing consent from these communicators. This researcher used personal networks to find key informants who led to others; the key informants who are perceived as 'insiders' allowed for communication with other participants. Care was taken to maintain the confidence, anonymity and security of informants.

### **Key Findings of the Research**

Throughout this research, it became apparent that messages dealing with elections and governance made up the bulk of what was distributed through radio trottoir. Election politics dominated the agenda on radio trottoir, particularly in the pre- and post-national elections periods in 2005 and 2010 in Ethiopia. Most of these messages reflected public discontent with political actors. In many instances, public policy announcements or media interviews with political actors were reworked by the populace into mockery of the government's proposed policies or actions.

For example, one story shared through radio trottoir is a re-working of an interview with Ethiopia's prime minister by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC):

**Radio trottoir version: Interview with the Prime Minister by BBC journalist**

Journalist: Honoured Prime Minister Meles, how do you look at inflation in the country?

PM: In principle, I glance at it sideways (in hatred). Ministers and their young followers are busy chewing 'chat', making 'du'a' (*a supplication in search of what they want Allah to grant them*) in order to make the economic crisis futile.

Journalist: Is this not contradicting your pledge that you endeavour to feed the nation thrice a day?

PM: It's not contradicting! No matter how it seems impossible to feed the nation thrice a day, since we have set a strategy which lets the nation to starve thrice a day and get away with it sitting idle in contemplation, talking. It could not be beyond our control at all. As far as it happens to be not an obstacle to the development, the hunger of the nation can never be our adversary. To your amazement, it has enabled us to rescue our nation from anti-health factors such as obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes that are affecting the international community.

Journalist: It's being heard that you will resign by the following election.

PM: Who said so? Me?

Journalist: Yes, you said so.

PM: Out of Meles, such a thing has never come. It is unfortunate that I don't have any competing antagonist to takeover my position. Consequently you find them calumniating me.

Journalist: But we have once witnessed, in the presence of foreign journalists as well, and took your word for it.

PM: Why do you talk nonsense? Has BBC ever recruited Amharic or Tigrigna speaking journalists? Do you hear me? Let alone leaving such a hot seat, a comfortable throne, see for yourself how much it's difficult to leave



the seat of your 'bercha' (*chat ceremony*) by just chewing a bundle of 'beleche' (*special type of chat*).

The intention is to show the government's inability to match its rhetoric or promises with actions. To some degree, this reworked story is meant to capture the real mood of the people as well as the government's failure in addressing food insecurity in its country. For instance, the prime minister's pledge, in the parliament, to feed the nation thrice a day was re-worked in the story as a promise to starve the nation. This underscores the peoples' lack of confidence in their government.

In other stories, human rights violations and the lack of freedom of expression are presented as important issues. For example, this story re-works a mainstream media report about the shooting of attempted bank robbers. In the radio trottoir version, the journalist challenges the official report:

**Journalist:** On different occasions, it's been common to hear that "bandits were killed for attempting to rob a Bank." But, we have come to witness here that there is no Bank at all in this area. Are you not contradicting the truth with such news of a bank robbery?

**Authority:** Not at all because our principle is to take necessary steps before any incident as a means of prevention. That is why we shot those bandits before the construction of a new Bank in the area.

The radio trottoir version uses a joke to pillory authority figures for punishing people for an offense they did not commit. Several radio trottoir stories also reflect the common perception that holding and expressing opinions which oppose government authorities could lead to death threats or loss of life.

The mainstream media, with its political orientation, is also discussed and evaluated in the radio trottoir political communication sphere. In these discussions, the main critique is that the only TV channel in the country – Ethiopian Television – lacks loyalty to the public when it comes to politics. The radio trottoir messages

make clear that mainstream media are not reliable sources of information on politics. The following radio trottoir story, entitled "The TV set shrank while ETV lied," captures this sentiment:

A daughter sent her mother some money from abroad and told her to buy a 21-inch television. When the daughter returned back home to Ethiopia, she observed that the TV was only 14 inches and asked her mother why she bought the smaller one when there was enough money for a 21-inch. The mother replied, "My daughter I actually did buy the 21-inch set. However, whenever I watch Ethiopian television the TV set shrinks because of the lies they always broadcast. And after it happened repeatedly I am left with this 14-inch TV. Still, I'm glad for you to see it at this size because it might disappear completely after a while because of the lies."

People are able to get away with criticism via radio trottoir because of their anonymity as sources behind these "creative jokes" that reflect public sentiment. Many of the interviewees for this study indicated that they do not worry about the sources of these political jokes and satire which are constantly being reproduced as they flow through a series of information networks. Moreover, these jokes appear in a variety of forms that range from oral narratives, poems and folk songs to print and electronic format. Hence, it is extremely difficult to track the original sources. This also makes it difficult for the government to censor or curtail the distribution of the contents.

Folk songs, for example, are often performed within small groups during events such as the Great Run, in social gatherings and at other sporting events. One informant who had participated in the 2010 Ethiopian Great Run said many of the poems in the songs performed at that particular event did not originate there. They were reproductions or recreations of previous performances from other occasions.

The source of the message does not seem to be important in radio trottoir. From interviews and observations it is clear that attention is paid not to who said it, but to what has been said. The participants seem to pay hardly any attention to the identities of original sources or producers of jokes. Most importantly, there is no fixed

producer or consumer role, unlike in mainstream media. Since the information flow is multi-directional, an individual who receives a certain joke may also act as a distributor to others. Those others may also redistribute it themselves, and the circulation thus continues.

The obscurity of the sources is also a common feature for the mobile phone SMS, Bluetooth and infrared messages in Ethiopia. The SMSs are perhaps the most likely messages to be attributed to an individual. However, the chain of the message exchange is very long and complex, making it difficult to reach back to the original source. The Bluetooth and infrared messages, on the other hand, are spaces where political message exchanges take place with a high degree of anonymity as the exact sources of the stories are not recognizable.

#### *Networks and genres of communication*

In Ethiopia, communications networks are founded on already-established linkages of friendship, kinship, neighbourhood, and membership in a similar ethnic group, party, profession or religion. Above all, however, having similar political views gets priority. In the radio trottoir sphere, people seem to communicate with trusted members of their network. The criteria to be considered a trusted member are unspoken, yet understood among members.

The majority of radio trottoir messages were communicated in folk or indigenous forms. The most-employed forms of these traditional modes of expression, and those selected for this study, can be categorized into two major folk genres: narratives, which appeared in the form of jokes or humorous tales and folk poems and songs, including Menezuma (Zakir), praise and curse verses (mirikat-inaergeman), popular and Azemari songs, and verses in graffiti and couplets. As a general feature, all include entertaining elements for their audiences. In addition, the messages appear in oral, print and electronic forms.

*Convergence of radio trottoir and new ICTs and conventional radio*

By definition, radio trottoir refers to word-of-mouth transmissions but this communication now takes place using mobile phone technologies like Bluetooth, infrared and SMS. Most communications with mobile phones were exchanged via Bluetooth and infrared. Use of this channel of communication is free to anyone whose mobile phone is Bluetooth-equipped. Customers are not expected to pay any service charge for consumption. Vast utilization of Bluetooth for political dialogue could be attributed to the anonymity this method offers to the sender. The compatibility of these technologies to exchange multimedia messages like audio, video, and picture messages might be another factor in their popularity. Underground audio and video cassettes are also used to communicate political messages, but their application appeared limited by comparison.

### **Conclusion and Further Areas of Research**

This research has attempted to analyze the role of radio trottoir in Ethiopia's political communications sphere. The most discussed political topics in the radio trottoir communication sphere between 2005 and 2010 were elections and governance, accounting for more than 120 of the 200 examined messages. Human rights and political parties are also among the important concerns raised. Most messages exhibit opposition to the current political system. As such, radio trottoir disseminates, educates, criticizes, mobilizes, and challenges information. The channels utilized vary from traditional oral communication to new technologies like the mobile phone.

It is evident that radio trottoir allows Ethiopians to use artistic and creative means to make their feelings known to their political leaders. From these messages, government and political actors can learn about the public's perception of their policies and governance record. They might also learn what measures should be taken to address popular discontentment.

This research was limited to probing two questions: "What was said through radio trottoir?" and "How was it said?" Future research will need to further explore the qualitative effects of radio trottoir on the country's politics, how it is used by Diaspora communities and its convergence with social media (in particular Facebook and Twitter).

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*Review Essay*

# **Communicating for Social Change, Empowerment & Human Rights in Africa**

*Tokunbo Ojo, York University, Toronto*

*Empowerment Radio: Voices Building a Community*, by Birgitte Jallof. Gudhjem, Denmark: Empowerhouse, 2012, (234 pp).

*Radio in Africa: Publics, Cultures, Communities*, edited by Liz Gunner, Dina Ligaga and Dumisani Moyo. Johannesburg, South Africa: Wits University Press, 2011, (320 pp).

*Radio in Africa: Publics, Cultures, Communities*, edited by Liz Gunner, Dina Ligaga and Dumisani Moyo, and Brigitte Jallof's book *Empow-*

*erment Radio* provides a contextual “insider’s perspective” on the unique blend of radio, cultural and participatory communication strategies for social change. Together, these two recent works that deal with radio in Africa provide the most comprehensive view on the subject published in English since the appearance of the edited collection on African broadcast cultures by Fardon and Furniss in 2000.

Built mainly on qualitative empirical evidence, *Radio in Africa* is a compilation of essays that is preoccupied with radio in everyday life and in the socio-political affairs of several African countries. It examines diverse radio formats and programs that range from radio theatre and talk-shows, to religious programs and public-service announcements in their socio-cultural contexts. *Radio in Africa* is grounded in scholarly research evidence and theories. Contrastingly, *Empowerment Radio* is more anecdotal and draws upon the author’s work experience in community radio in Africa, Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

*Empowerment Radio* provides a contextual “insider’s perspective” on the unique blend of radio, cultural and participatory communication strategies for social change. In this blending, the author highlights several instances in which the communities in question harnessed community radio stations for social change and empowerment of marginalized groups. Among the cited cases are Radio Muthiyana in Maputo, Mozambique and 101.7 Mama FM in Uganda. Both radio stations are run by women for women’s empowerment. Through their diverse educative programs, these radio stations address the plight of under-privileged women and ensure that these women’s voices are heard in the political stream. A 2008 impact assessment shows that Mama FM has been “successful in mobilising its audiences against domestic violence and to take up positions of leadership in the local council system among others” (Judith, 2008: 3).



Jallov's book not only highlights the successful community radio stations and 'what works best' in the operation of these stations for social change, book also examines 'what did not work' and the challenges that regularly confront community radio stations. These challenges include poor planning, absence of funds and the poor integration of the community's needs into the programming. In sum, Jallov's book can be seen as a compilation of 'best practices' for running community radio for social change in Africa.

*Empowerment Radio* serves as a complementary practical guide to *Radio in Africa*, which critically assesses socio-political and cultural functions of radio in Africa. Some of the community radio stations cited by Jallov as models – such as Radio Okapi in Congo – are among the radio stations empirically and critically scrutinized in *Radio in Africa*. As an edited collection of essays that explores the interwoven relationship between communication and social change, *Radio in Africa* draws on theoretical perspectives that range from Jurgen Habermas' public sphere to Paulo Freire's dialogic communication approach and Nancy Fraser's subaltern counterpublics in its analyses.

*Radio in Africa* is divided into three major sections. The four essays that constitute the first section, "Radio, Popular Democracy and New Publics," discuss the relationship between public discourses and radio. Though not explicitly articulated in each of these essays, Habermas' conceptual frameworks of public sphere and communicative actions underpin the analyses. The first essay, by Wisdom Tettey, conceptualizes radio as a "genre of participatory media" that promotes civic engagement and participation in Ghana. What makes radio distinctive in this case is the opportunity that it offers citizens, in particular marginalized groups, and "members of civil society to 'talk back' to the large institutions of public life" (Howley, 2010: 73). The case study of clandestine a radio station in Zimbabwe, which is the focus of the third essay in this section, contextualizes this further. The author analyzes the strategies of the Short Wave

Radio Africa (SWRA), a clandestine radio station based in London, and how it gave voices to exiled Zimbabweans and political activists.

The last essay in this section underscores the differential power relation in the multiple public spheres that radio fostered. To illustrate this, Dorothea Schulz analyzes the constellation of discursive frameworks that were linked to differential power relations between males and females in Islamic radio sermons in Mali. In the essay, she examines the emergence of female preachers (*hadjas*) on the radio and the tension this generates in the community. Implicit in her analysis is the “dissonant valuation of the authority” (p. 65) and the patriarchal approach in which communication messages were processed, interpreted and renegotiated in the sacred public space of religiosity.

Schulz’s essay, alongside that by Maria Frahm-Arp in the book’s third section, opens a new frontier in the scholarship on media and religion in Africa. Despite the popularity of religious programs on radio and television in many African countries, relatively little scholarship interest has been shown in the new forms of religious imagery and representation in public imagination. Hopefully, both Schulz’s and Frahm-Arp’s essays will serve as springboards for more scholarly enquiries into the use of mass media for the dissemination of religious sermons in the African context.

Radio’s “thick cultural expressions” are the central preoccupation of the collection’s second section: “The Cultures of Radio: Languages of the Everyday.” The six essays in this section examine the intertwined history of everyday culture, politics and radio. In this respect, the editors assemble essays which explore that entanglement of radio in everyday cultural activities, identity formation, and normalization of certain political norms in both colonial and postcolonial contexts. Specifically, Sekibakiba Lekgoathi’s essay, “Bantustan Identity, Censorship and Subversion on Northern Sotho Radio under Apartheid, 1960s-80s”, shows how the apartheid government attempted to use the South African Broadcasting Corporation’s Ra-

Radio Bantu as a propaganda tool for the reinforcement of "ethnic separatism in apartheid South Africa" (p.118). Lekgoathi explores how the government 'normalized' its censorship techniques of counter-perspectives on Radio Bantu through its editorial control of program contents and selective hiring practice. What is most interesting is the black radio hosts' use of cultural idioms and proverbs to bypass the government's censorship mechanism. These cultural idioms and proverbs "gave them a freedom of interpretation and usage that censors could never completely control" (p.126). More so, cultural idioms and proverbial talk allowed them to undermine the government's propaganda agenda of "ethnic separatism" and control.

In addition to Lekgoathi's essay, contributions by Liz Gunner and Dina Ligaga also stand out in this section. Gunner and Ligaga write on indigenous radio drama in oppressive environments (South Africa and Kenya, respectively). Both demonstrate the multivocality of indigenous languages and folklore in the evolution of a culture of resistance, and renegotiation of collective social memory within the web of social relations of power and linguistic diversity (Ngugi, 1986; West & Fair, 1993). Overall, this section provides a valuable insight into the intertwined relationship between the indigenous oral culture and radio in colonial and postcolonial African countries. In particular, it shows the prevalence and fluidity of indigenous language forms in social and advocacy communication on radio.

Furthermore, the authors affirm the vitality of traditional genres such as proverbs and folktales in the socio-cultural knowledge transfer and political process. In this context, radio serves as "a forum of self-referential discourse in which reflexive public subjectivity laid a foundation" (Coleman & Ross, 2010: 30) for the formation of public opinion and counter-hegemonic discourse. As Jalloh contends in her book, radio's versatility and adaptability to the traditional genre makes it a vital community voice and a strategic transmitter of cultural heritage in Africa. Being the eye, ear and voice of common people, it speaks in "dialects and languages" that both the subaltern

and dominant groups understand (Gilberds & Myers, 2012). Thus, it is not only a platform of creative expression; it is also the heartbeat of civic and communal life. No wonder Marshall McLuhan called it the extension of people's "central nervous systems that is matched only by human speech itself" (2009:46).

Against this background, the collection's last section focuses on radio and national conversation. Stephanie Wolters starts this section with her essay, which explores the role of Radio Okapi in the peace-building process in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). She discusses the operation of Radio Okapi and its larger contribution to the peace process that saw the "formation of a transitional and a new constitution," following the assassination of President Laurent Kabila in 2001. While Radio Okapi's contributions to the peace process are assessed and given positive review, Wolters also discusses the volatile working environment in which Congolese journalists operate. She underscores this fact with reference to the assassination of two of Radio Okapi's journalists.

Apart from the threat to their lives, journalists also have to contend with the political inference in their work. This does raise the question of editorial independence, which has implications for the quality and the standard of journalism in the long term. These challenges are also echoed in David Smith's essay, which focuses on radio in the peace building process in Somalia. Although Wolters and Smith both provide descriptive accounts of their experiences in Congo and Somalia, respectively they also provide rich resources for scholars working in this emerging subfield of peace journalism. In view of the complexity of the practical side of peace journalism that they explore, both essays would be good materials for seminar discussion in courses on peace journalism, and media and conflict.

Overall, *Empowerment Radio* and *Radio in Africa* are excellent additions to the scholarship on African media culture and development communication. They attest to why radio still remains the most significant communication platform in Africa's diverse socio-

cultural milieu and political landscape. Both books are highly recommended for anyone with an interest in African media studies and development communication.

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# **Africa Communicating: Digital Technologies, Representation, and Power**

Gado Alzouma, Monica Chibita, Wisdom Tettey,  
and Allan Thompson

What follows is an edited transcript of a panel that took place during the 2013 conference of the Canadian Association of African Studies (CAAS), held at Carleton University. This panel, chaired by Professor Allan Thompson, of Carleton, was called: "Africa Communicating: Digital Technologies, Representation, and Power."

## **Allan Thompson**

I teach journalism here at Carleton and also direct something called the Centre for Media and Transitional Societies, which right now has 22 journalism and communications students heading to Africa for eight-week media internships. Most of them will be working with

news organizations but some will also be working with media development organizations.

I also have an interest in digital media because of my involvement with a project called Radio Convergence and Development in Africa, which was looking at the nexus between ICTs – information and communication technologies – and conventional radio.

In a sense, everyone has heard the cliché of *the digital media revolution*, this burgeoning thing that's happening in Africa. We all seem to talk about it, we all seem to hear about it and it is indeed a cliché. But the fact that something has become a cliché doesn't mean that it's not true. It just means that people often use the expression so casually that we can't always be sure what they're actually talking about.

What we're here to do today is to try to give this issue some thought and put a bit of flesh on the bones of the cliché by looking at it more closely, particularly by examining some evidence about what this digital media revolution means in Africa.

We have three excellent panellists to take us through that discussion.

We have Gado Alzouma from the American University of Nigeria. The title of his presentation is "The Rhetoric of ICT4D in Africa." So he will be dealing head on with the cliché, the rhetoric. Gado is an associate professor of Anthropology at the School of Arts and Sciences, American University of Nigeria. He did his undergraduate and graduate studies in France in sociology and his PhD in anthropology at Southern Illinois University.

In addition to his teaching and research he's done evaluation work with such organizations as Care International and the World Bank. In the early 1990s he was a social advisor to Niger's Prime Minister at the time. He also did consulting work for UNICEF and later for the IDRC's regional office in Dakar, Senegal.

He is widely published – as are all of our speakers – in the field of Information and Communication Technologies for Development,



or ICT4D, his primary area of research and the subject of his paper today.

Monica Chibita is from Uganda Christian University. The title of her paper is "New Media, New Representations? Assessing Medial Literacy in Eastern and Northern Uganda."

After nearly 20 years with the Mass Communication Department at Makerere University, in Kampala, Monica took a position last year as Head of the Mass Communication Department at Uganda Christian University. Monica studied at Makerere, holds an M.A. in Journalism from the University of Iowa and earned her PhD in Communication at the University of South Africa.

She joined Makerere in 1994 and was instrumental in the school's research program on top of a heavy teaching role. She's a member of the editorial boards of the African Journal for Communication Theory and Research, and *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*; and associate editor of the *Journal of African Media Studies*, JAMS.

Our third speaker is Wisdom Tettey, from the University of British Columbia. The title of his presentation is "Mobile Phones, Democratic Citizenship, and the Changing Ecology of Political Communication in Ghana." Wisdom is currently the Dean of the Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies and a professor of Cultural Studies at UBC – the University of British Columbia.

He studied Political Science, Russian, and Communication Studies at the University of Ghana; completed a Masters degree in Political Science at UBC; and a PhD in Political Science at Queen's University.

He has a keen interest in the new information and communications technologies and their impact on society, particularly in Africa. He's also engaged in research on mass media in Africa and their relevance for democratization, hence his involvement as co-editor of the recent volume *African Media and the Digital Sphere*.

His paper today is on mobile phones, democratic citizenship, and a change in ecology of political communication in Ghana.

We will begin with Gado Alzouma.

### **Gado Alzouma**

What I'm going to talk about is this cliché mentioned in the introduction. I would like to first say that there is a discourse, a rhetoric that is clouding the whole issue of ICTs in Africa. Unless we know the facts, unless we go beyond that discourse, beyond that rhetoric, we would not know how it is actually, because what people are telling us right now is that there are changes that are happening in Africa. It's not just that everybody has a cell phone, they have access to internet and so on.

But the real situation is far more complex than that and not so different from what we're used to. It's just that we have this discourse in our mind and we've begun to think that there is something new that is happening.

So the first thing to know is that most of the issues that we actually discuss in our conferences, they are concerned with the preoccupations that are the preoccupations of Western countries. The issues we are discussing actually find their origins in Western countries.

It seems that every ten years, we have presented to us the latest technology that is key for the development of Africa. We had the era of radio, the era of television and then the era of computers.

In the last two decades, it has been thought that computers and internet are transforming Africa, that they are having a revolutionary effect on the economic situation and so on. Now, we see that the focus is shifting to mobile phones. People are no longer talking solely about the internet and about computers, they are now talking about the mobile phone.

And why are they talking about the mobile phone? Because the reality when it comes to the introduction of computers and internet, even though the discourse would let us believe that it is fabulous and amazing, actually, the penetration of the computer and the internet in Africa is still very, very, very low. However, when it comes to the mobile phones, 60 percent of the African population has access to the mobile phone today.

In my view this mobile phone thing is clouding the whole issue of the development of Africa and the information society. And what I want to talk about is to show that, even when it comes to the mobile phone, the situation is not really what it is said to be. Having access to the mobile phone does not mean that people really use mobile phones the way, for example, they do in most Western countries. So I want to talk about what I call the mobile divide. In the same way that there was a digital divide, today there is a mobile divide.

What do people tell us when it comes to the internet, computers and mobile phones? They say that they have the ability to provoke economic and social development. That's what we call informing development, and these technical objectives are presented as having some qualities and potential that are different from all other technologies that have been introduced in Africa before.

There is no doubt that there are changes that are happening in Africa right now, and those changes are very important. For example, the average economic growth rate was around 5.5 percent between 2001 and 2010. The expected growth rate is 6.2 percent in 2013, and the six countries out of the ten that have the highest growth rate in the world are African countries. For example, countries such as Angola, 11 percent, Nigeria 8.9 percent and so on.

So six African countries will be among the world's ten fastest growing countries before 2016. And over the next five years, the growth rate of the African economy will outpace Asia. (All growth

figures I'm presenting are from the International Monetary Fund, Regional Economic Outlook: sub-Saharan Africa, 2012.)

So there is a lot happening in Africa and there is no doubt that the changes are positive. For example, there are more African children in school than ever before, there are more democratic elections, and while war still exists, it is not so prevalent, is less deadly than it used to be and there are fewer countries affected than there used to be in the past.

And there is no doubt that ICTs have greatly contributed to this change. For example, more than 600 million Africans have a mobile phone today. So no other technology has been so rapidly and so widely made available to Africans in history. A 2004 study the International Telecommunication Union noted that "Africa is the fastest growing mobile phone market today in the world."

Providing ICTs is one of the sectors where the difference between developed and developing countries is the most reduced today. And in some sectors, such as, for example, mobile banking, Africa appears to be more advanced than most developed countries in the world. People are using mobile phones in very innovative ways, things that we don't find, for example, in countries such as the United States or Canada.

And there is no doubt that ICTs have greatly contributed. Many studies have shown that there is a link between the development of ICTs and the GDP growth in Africa. And there is also a link between the development of ICTs and income generating activities. Millions of Africans are today employed in the sector of ICTs in Africa.

So I'm not going to have some kind of dystopian discourse, I'm not going to tell you that ICTs are not useful, that technology is not useful. Of course, technologies are useful and the computers, the internet and cell phones also are a positive change that we have to support.

But once we have said that, does that mean that we have correctly assessed the situation? Is the introduction or the physical availability of mobile phones, for example, the whole story?

Shouldn't we go beyond that? Some of the questions we have asked ourselves are the following: Did Africa really enter the information society as has been said? What other opportunities and solutions to development problems are we missing by focusing solely or mainly on ICTs, because this is today the trend or the tendency in development projects. In United Nations development agencies, in NGOs, everywhere the focus is today on ICTs.

But what are we missing by focusing mostly or solely on ICTs? In what ways are ICTs reinforcing or weakening existing inequalities? Because some of the things that are never talked about are, for example, inequalities in Africa.

When we think about Africa, we tend to think that it is some kind of uniform world where everybody is the same. But actually there are class differences in Africa, and when it comes to access to ICTs there are also inequalities, even when it comes to access to mobile phones.

It is difficult to think that such a tiny object as a mobile phone could be the object of some kind of socioeconomic differentiation between people, but actually there are differences, when it comes to the appropriation and the use of mobile phones in Africa. There are differences between people and that's what I'm going to talk about.

What I want to say is that we should go beyond the fact of equipping people with the technology. We should see beyond that, what is actually happening in societies, between people, in their relationships, between groups, for example, between men and women, poor and rich and so on. What is actually happening when it comes to technology and the introduction of technology.

So my main arguments are the following: The first one is that the rationale behind the rhetoric of ICT4D is to equip people with technologies, not to empower them. The emphasis is on technolo-

gies, always on technologies, not people. What I mean is that the whole human dimension of the relationship between technology and people is most of the time forgotten in that discourse, and when faced with a development problem, the reflex is to seek a technological solution. For example, in countries such as Canada and the United States, of course, the more developed countries, the question of illiteracy does not exist, but actually in our countries, in countries such as Niger, think about this, more than 60 percent of people cannot read and write in Niger, more than 60 percent, and 80 percent of women cannot read and write.

So the question of illiteracy is the fundamental question when it comes to the appropriation of ICTs in Africa. But in this rhetoric, the rhetoric of ICT4D, it's like there is only one side of development, the lack of technology. People always tend to see the problems in the prism of technology and only technology, mostly ignoring the many other sides of development, for example, lack of education, a lack of basic amenities and so on.

Are ICTs or mobile phones all encompassing? I would like to give you some figures: According to the Internet World Statistics' website (2012), Africa has only 7 percent of the internet users in the world today. We are bringing together a whole conference with hundreds of people here, talking about ICTs, how they are important in Africa but actually who are the users of the internet in Africa? Seven percent of the population; that's it. That's it, 7 percent.

And some countries such as Burundi have only 1.7 percent users, Chad 1.9 percent, et cetera; it's a very, very low use of the internet.

So when people talk about the ICT revolution in Africa, what they are actually talking about is the mobile phone. So this discourse is not really about ICTs, because ICTs are not only the mobile phone, but also the internet, computers and so on. So this is not only about the introduction of the physical availability, it is about

how to use computers. Digital literacy for example is something very, very important.

Actually, when it comes to landline phones, the internet, computers and all other technologies, Africa is lagging very far behind the rest of the world.

So are ICTs all encompassing? It is worth glancing at some of the research about mobile phones. All kinds of problems are said to be being solved. It is as if there is some kind of magic effect of the mobile phone, just because they introduced the mobile phone it will improve access to education and foster democratic election campaigns. That's how things are often presented today.

So let's look at the actual effects of mobile phones. One of the authors, for example, has this to say in a study titled "Sociology of the Mobile Phone", Geser wrote: "By being adopted, irrespective of education and family background, the cell phone bridges at least some gaps between different social classes" (p. 6). Meaning that the differences between social classes can be erased through the use of cell phones.

And because the poor and the rich, all of them equally have access to mobile phones, the differences are erased? Is that true? No. If you look more closely, you see that people without a university education use mobile phones less often and differently than those with a higher level of education. This group of users also spends more of their net worth on their mobile phone than the others.

Having a mobile phone does not mean that people are using it, and having a mobile phone does not mean that people equally use it, and that they have access to all the functionalities of mobile phones.

According to a survey of the Institut National de la Statistique (2009), in Niger the expenditure in mobile telephony is higher in urban areas than in rural areas. Mobile phone expenses also account for a larger share of rural household budget meaning that it weighs

more on the rural and poor people than it does, for example, for city dwellers and people who are better off.

So something also that is said is this: yes it's true that Africans may not have access to the internet and computers, but because they have a smartphone now, it will be possible for them to have access to the internet thanks to smartphones. But who has a smartphone, and who can use a smartphone?

Think about sending an SMS. If you are illiterate, how would you write or send an SMS?

What do illiterate people do with the cell phone? They don't do what people who are educated do with the cell phone, they just call and receive calls, and sometimes they don't even call.

Don't think that because they have a cell phone that they are calling. They're not calling because they don't even have the money to call. They usually beep. Beeping is when they call people and they wait to be called back.

Think about this: According to a study by Aker and Mbiti, "the price of the cheapest mobile phone in Niger is equivalent to 12.5 kilograms of millet, enough to feed a household of five for five days" (2010, p.5). That's the price of a mobile phone.

So what would people do in that case?

I read a paper by somebody from Burkina Faso about the so-called innovative uses of mobile phone. It tells us about a person who is working in a village in a rural area. Every day he has to climb a tree to make calls, and this is presented as a positive innovative use of the cell phone. Or using the phone as a radio is presented as innovative and positive.

But the question we have to ask ourselves is the following: Who are those people who have to invent "innovative uses" of cell phones? They are, essentially, those people who are poor because they don't have the means—they don't have the means to pay for the technology.



These are the people who are having those “innovative uses” that are being currently celebrated in the literature. Yes! Africans are using mobile phones in “innovative ways”, but who are those people who are using the mobile phones in “innovative ways”, climbing trees, and using second-hand cell phones, et cetera?

Actually, they are making virtue out of necessity—just because they cannot do otherwise. Poverty explains the innovation. The innovative solutions are actually a mark of inequality and differentiated use of mobile phones.

So my conclusion is the following: The rhetoric of ICT4D tends to obscure the above-mentioned problems. I call for integrated development projects.

What are integrated development projects? Not just giving cell phones and computers to people, but also educating them because somebody who’s educated better benefits from the use of ICTs than somebody who is uneducated.

And think about the social network of somebody who has a higher education and all of the things that somebody who has a higher education can do with cell phones and computers.

And on the other side, think about somebody who is illiterate. What can he do with a cell phone? He can just call out and receive calls; not more than that.

So we have to educate people in order for them to benefit more from the use of technologies. We have to educate people in order for them to better benefit from the use of technology, meaning augmenting their social capital.

This is what I have to say. Thank you.

### **Monica Chibita**

My presentation will be in two parts. I will first share some general thoughts on what has been said for and against ICTs and their worth in African society and then I’ll go to data from a study

that we conducted recently that dealt with issues related to this. At the end I'll spend a little more time on the mobile phone and the internet.

For a long time, the research focus in Africa has been on the traditional media, particularly radio and TV, and their democratic and developmental potential.

In the last couple of decades, though, the emphasis has been shifting to the new media. When I first started reading about media and development, one of the first papers I read was from Wisdom Tettey. So in my mind, Wisdom Tettey was this old professor.

The potential of new media technologies in Africa has been hailed by many scholars and development partners. Socha and Eber-Schmid (2012), for instance, argue that new media

...holds out a possibility of on-demand access to content any time, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation, and community formation around the media content.

Another important promise of new media is the 'democratization' of the creation, publishing, distribution, and consumption of media content...

— and the death of the gate-keeper.

Most technologies described as "new media" could be described as digital, to the extent that they can be easily manipulated and networked, and are portable, capable of compressing large volumes of data, and enhancing interactivity.

The internet certainly falls under this category, as do certain types of mobile phones that meet the above criteria of the kinds that Gado was talking about.

Of particular interest in the African context have been the mobile phone and, to a limited extent, the internet. Scholars have attributed improvement of information gathering, processing, distribution, storage, and engagement with communities through the advent of these new technologies.

The technologies have been credited with empowering ordinary people and enabling them to participate in public discourse on such profound subjects as democracy and development.

There have been experiments with, particularly, mobile phones in an attempt to enhance access to and delivery of health, agricultural extension services, education, small and medium enterprise skills and so on.

The impact of the new media on culture, identity, and democracy has also been widely discussed. Particularly Underwood, Mapples, Dreyfus, Banda, Mudhai, and Tettey (2009), have talked about these things.

However, there has also been a steady stream of voices – we heard one this afternoon – cautioning against overstating the magic that these technologies are able to work in African contexts.

Fourie (2007), for instance, elaborates some of the key criticisms to dampen the enthusiasm about the potential of the new technologies. Poster (2001) and Castells (2003), though they acknowledge the potential of the new media, caution about what, in a neighbouring country, might be called “irrational exuberance.”

Other scholars, including Alzouma (2005), Tumusiime (2007) – and I know that Alzouma has written a few other things – Bornman (2012), Duncan (2013), all caution against getting carried away with the magic of the new technologies without due consideration of the realities within which these technologies are appropriated.

As Banda, Mudhai, and Tettey have argued:

The value of new media lies in the extent to which they mesh with old media to provide multimedia platforms that allow for greater democratic participation, inclusion, and expression.

Discussions of new media often disregard the unusual African terrain, which defies many of the technological innovations said to be reconfiguring the structures and processes of communication globally. This includes

poor telecommunication networks in most parts of Africa, resulting in low levels of Internet usage.

Nevertheless, online communities are emerging across Africa. And, although they are mostly among the elites, they show Africans taking advantage of new technology to advance their own identities and agendas.

I quoted that in total because it's fairly important.

The realities on the ground in many African countries certainly indicate that there's a gap between awareness and access, and in the case, for instance, of mobile phones, awareness and ownership.

There are also critical shortages in the skills to use the technologies even where access is assured. Thus, Fourie (2007) argues further:

Even though one may have access to the new media, it may mean nothing if a person or a group doesn't know how to use it in order to gain from it.

A computer and the internet on the table in an office, study, tele-centre or post office doesn't guarantee food on the table, and should not be presented as capable of doing so.

Burton (2002) observes that for some users the technologies are seen as bestowing status rather than serving as a development tool, so they never really do exploit them for their full democratic or developmental potential.

Wilson (2009) argues that the way technological leapfrogging is discussed gives the impression that there's a clear developmental catch-up formula enabled by adoption of the latest technologies from the developed world.

Alzouma (2005), however, argues that that is not the case:

ICTs cannot leapfrog beyond the ordinary development problems Africans are faced with. Introducing computers in rural areas, for example, does not automatically solve the problem of illiteracy, health-related problems, or poverty. The solutions to these problems reside outside of the realm of technology.

Alzouma adds that it's important to bear in mind the reality of the digital divide as well as inequalities in access. One must note, though, that the problem is not inherent in the technologies, but rather in the structures of inequality within which these technologies have been introduced.

Policy and regulation to enable or disable access could be a greater obstacle than the diffusion of new technologies into African society per se.

A significant proportion of findings from empirical studies of the use of the new media technologies in African contexts highlight lack of access, financial resources, infrastructure, and skills to optimize the use of the new media technologies and, indeed, some of this research has informed recent development interventions using the new media technologies.

And now I'll move to the situation in Uganda.

Uganda, like other African nations, has recently experienced great growth in the numbers of mobile phone subscribers, as well as in access to the internet, especially among the youth and the elite. The assumption would be that this has given rise to new synergies between the old and the new, thus expanding opportunities for participation and representation.

It is, however, as we have heard, not this simple. The percentage of people who own mobile phones or who have access to the internet is still considerably lower than similar figures relating to the traditional media, for instance.

So the Uganda Communications Commission recently commissioned a study to assess the general performance of the media, gauge the adequacy of local content, identify gaps in policy which need to be addressed in the advent of the new media and of the convergence of media technologies.

Given the context presented above, it seemed productive to study the new media alongside the traditional media rather than in isolation.

I conducted this study along with a colleague, Richard Kibombo, who also happens to be a statistician. Unlike a similar study conducted in 2004 by the same researchers, this study asked some specific questions to gauge whether Ugandans in the eastern and northern regions were aware of the new media technologies, had access to them, whether they understood their potential, and what they used them for. We, of course, asked questions about the traditional media as well.

Underlying these questions was the question of whether Ugandans in the eastern and northern regions – which is what we studied – felt their concerns – political, cultural, religious, et cetera – were better represented in the media with the advent of the new media technologies.

I now move to a little bit of background information before I present the data.

There is at least one FM station in most districts of Uganda, and there are at least 112 districts. TV is less widespread. The sector is dominated by the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation, Nation Television and Wavah Broadcasting Services.

Radio stations tend to broadcast in one dominant regional language, but include slots of some of the minority languages to cast a wider net.

Nationally, English and Luganda are the dominant broadcast languages, with English certainly dominant on television.

So the problem that we were trying to deal with was to gauge if available media are:

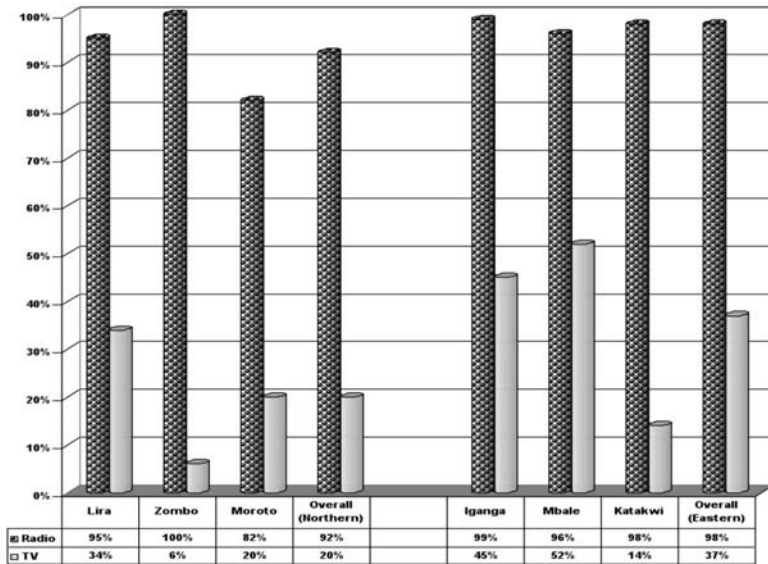
- serving the best interests of the majority of Ugandans;
- enhancing democracy and development;
- respectful of cultural sensitivities;
- growing evenly and sustainably; and
- most importantly, if the audiences understand and can evaluate these things.

So the study seeks to update the findings of an earlier study, which was done in 2004, and bring on board concerns that have emerged in the last seven years.

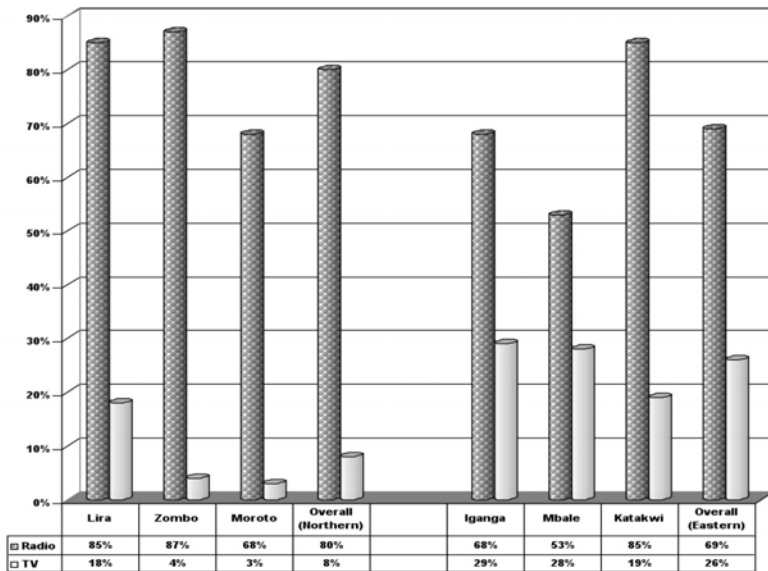
In summary, we had 720 household interviews; we had 79 key informant interviews; and we had 35 focus group discussions in six districts.

The findings, again, in summary.

How did people assess the general performance of the media? And this is the media in general, not just mobile phone or Internet.



These were the findings on radio listenership. The tall bars are for radio listenership in different districts and the short ones are for TV viewership.



The above graph represents the proportion of respondents who rated radio and TV coverage as adequate by district and region. The tall bar is radio in different districts and the short one is TV in different districts, just to reinforce the previous data.

Rural-urban disparities in satisfaction with urban respondents happier with the extent to which they're covered than rural respondents.

People in the towns feel much happier with what extent they're covered by radio and television for obvious reasons, because stations like to set up more in urban areas.

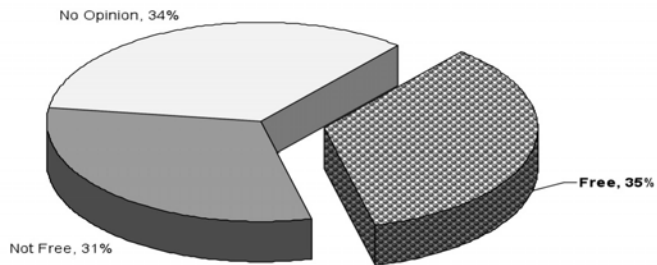
Satellite TV is filling the TV vacuum. Of course, very few people have access to television – and still fewer people have access to satellite television, but at least they can gather around one TV set at the bar and watch a premiership game.

What about their assessment of the role of the media in promoting diversity? Our study probed perceptions of the role of the media in promoting political, religious, ethnic, and other types of diversity. Overall, the majority rated the media's performance posi-



tively, but there was some hesitation around whether or not, as a whole, the media were free.

And this pie chart just summarizes it for us. Thirty-five percent say they're free; 31 percent said not free; and 34 percent declined comment, they said they had no opinion.



Across the board, the government-owned stations were considered to lack objectivity. The private stations were looked at more positively, although some said that they are more active during election time.

Political and commercial interests and the interests of owners were identified as key influences on the freedom of the media to air diverse political views.

People are free to go on air as long as they can afford it, or as long as the management allows them. And then people are not very keen to comment on this particular issue.

Then representing religious diversity, more than half of those interviewed gave the media a favourable rating on representing religious diversity. Muslims, who are in the minority, said they felt mar-

ginalised, but Christians contested this and said the Muslims were dominating the airwaves in some parts of the country.

Key factors emerging on religious diversity were:

- Who owns the station and what are their inclinations?
- How much power do they wield?
- Who do they employ?
- Who has money to buy the air-time?

And this was as true for religious diversity as for political diversity.

Generally, there was satisfaction with the availability of programming that addresses women's issues. But there was dissatisfaction with the framing of gender issues, both among male and female respondents.

There were complaints about "immoral" content and the media not being sensitive to the culture.

The majority of the respondents said they were happy with the language mix but it's important to note that there's a very, very strong attachment to their local language, which brings into question the issue of the internet and how much of this it can accommodate.

Then on representing identities, what came out is that the media are doing more to promote local identities than a national identity. Just the way the social set-up is, and so on, the stations concentrate a lot more on insular issues than national issues and people are aware of this.

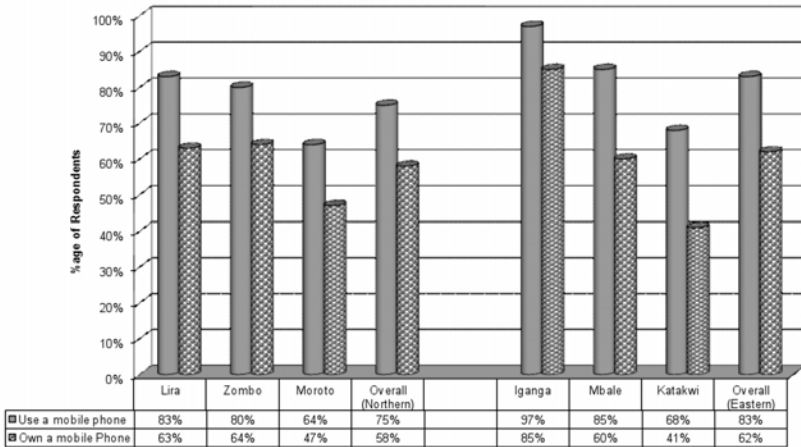
There were concerns expressed about lies in the media and general concerns about the lack of professionalism.

There were concerns expressed about the cost of TV sets. The majority have no access to the internet at all or do not know how to use their phones to access it.

And now for the new media: Eight out of ten respondents reported using a mobile phone, though fewer said they owned one. And you know how this is – because everybody is often sharing one phone.

Significant disparities in ownership of mobile phones emerged by district with reported access increasing with “urbanness” – the more urban the district was, the more people owned mobile phones.

Fig8: Proportion of Respondents Who Own or Use Mobile Phones by District



The tall towers there, the red ones, represent use of mobile phones and the shorter ones are ownership of mobile phones. So use was 83 percent and ownership was 63 percent.

So what do they use the mobile phones for?

Phones were mostly used for networking and business or mobile money transfer.

Many do not know that they can access email on the phone or do not have data-enabled phones.

Also, many do not know that they can access the news or join in discussions on radio and TV. Only 37 percent reported using a mobile phone to participate in radio or TV programmes. However, the focus group discussions, particularly with the youth, showed an appreciation for the synergies between the mobile phones and the traditional media among younger people.

This is just a quote from the study. Again, I think you can read it faster than I can.

Initially people bought phones for communication but now people express their views and feelings, especially on political issues, for example, when their leader goes on radio they are able to comment or commend, express what is happening in their communities; people can easily tell their leaders what they feel on radio over phone in that direct expression (FGD participant, Youth Lira).

So among the youth there is a general feeling that they understand convergence and how they can optimize this.

So who knows about the internet and who uses it?

Over half of all respondents across the regions — well, half of the respondents who agreed to answer the question on the internet — of course, many of them did not — said they had heard of the internet but only 12 percent said they had used it.

Of those who did use it, 35 percent said they usually access the Internet from an internet café. Other means of access were mobile phones, mobile Internet/dongle or flash, the workplace and “other”.

What do they use the Internet for?

The majority of respondents said they use the internet mostly for networking and research. I wasn't too sure about this. But most of these were students.

Other uses included recreation and business — and this, again, mobile money transfer and striking deals.

Only a small proportion of the youth seemed to link their access to the internet to increased access opportunities to the traditional media, and therefore increased opportunities for representation of their views and experiences. To most respondents the connection between the internet and the traditional media was beyond the scope of discussion.

The democratising role of the media in general was appreciated, but people complained about increasing owner influence, commercial interests, and government influence—government influence directly on the government-owned station, but indirectly through ownership by conditions.

In conclusion, there are relatively few Ugandans who know about the internet and the communication and networking opportunities it offers, and even fewer who use it. These are mostly people 25 years and younger who are educated and urban. There's a limited appreciation of the potential synergies accruing from the convergence of the media.

The uses that people who have access to the new media put them to are more likely to be uses that satisfy personal or social needs or confer status, rather than those aimed at loftier goals.

Structural factors are still significant for access, and the majority will only benefit from the technologies in an indirect way.

Literacy in the new media is perhaps best assessed alongside literacy in the old media because many developing societies are still grappling with the magic, even, of TV.

The value of the new media lies in how their users optimize synergies with the traditional media to expand democratic, developmental, and other spaces.

Policy may have a contribution to make when dealing with the underlying problem and access issues.

The realities of the proliferation and use of the new media in contexts such as Uganda are far from the magical stage envisioned by "techno-optimism" or "techno-utopianism."

Policy must not neglect the need to continue opening up access to and capacity for optimizing the traditional media in the excitement of the new media, as this risks leaving out the majority of the population.

### **Wisdom Tettey**

I would like to share with you a discussion that focuses on mobile telephony in particular, so I'm not going to be as all-encompassing as my colleagues were. But I think they do set the context for my discussion in a number of ways.

I would like to start off with a discussion about the relationship between ICTs and development and to interrogate what some of the theoretical and technological concerns have been about the use of ICTs and development, particularly with regard to politics and democratization. I'll focus on mobile telephony within the Ghanaian context, exploring issues that deal with the changing dynamics of telephony in general and zeroing in on mobile telephony in particular, and try to understand what some of the current dynamics are in terms of how they shape political engagement.

Then I'll address citizen journalism and the idea of civic intelligence and the voicing of political views by different categories of citizens and try to look at some of the mundane, seemingly routine conversations that happen via these technologies and the extent to which they shape the political landscape.

Finally, I'll conclude with some discussion about trans-nationalism and how that gets implicated in the politics of home and how mobile telephony becomes an avenue through which these kinds of interactions take place.

There is an important debate about the relationship between ICTs and politics, particularly regarding the impact of innovations on democratic governance. Many futurists and technologists and democratic theorists have said that the internet and modern technologies are enabling a realization of direct democracy.

Of course, you've got the critics who claim that they are at best automating existing democratic processes and structures. On the other end you've got techno-sceptics who argue that no fundamental changes happen as a result of the injection of these technologies because the basic structures that shape political organizations or relationships have not been significantly affected by the infusion of these technologies.

These debates have tended to centre mostly on the technologies that my two colleagues talked about, which have to do with computing and the internet. We are just beginning to see some incursion

into the area of mobile telephony. This shift to mobile telephony is not surprising because we did pass the 6 billion mark in 2011 in terms of number of people using mobile phones in the world. So it's not surprising that this has become a significant part of the discourse around technologies.

These devices are becoming in some way the very essence of convergence. You can listen to your radio, you can surf the net, you can do all these kinds of things, all on these hi-tech devices. So there's significance for both theoreticians of this global dynamic between technology and development, as well as for people who engage in the commercial business, as the level of enthusiasm is going through the roof by and large. So for academics there's a significant new kid on the block that is worth exploring further. For business people in the commercial area of telephony, there's a huge increase in the market share for their technology.

So in some ways, these two converging enthusiasms have elevated the importance of talking about this technology and what it means for people in different parts of the world.

For Africa, mobile telephony is particularly important for a variety of reasons, in terms of its relative salience compared to other kinds of ICTs.

These include the fact that it is more preponderant, the fact that it traverses some of the constraints of language and distance and so on, particularly if you're talking relative to fixed lines and the fact that it is by and large relatively cheaper and increasingly becoming so.

I know that my two colleagues did talk about the financial constraints on access, but the reality is that in terms of the various kinds of technologies, mobile telephony is, in fact, relatively cheap. And in the Ghanaian context, you find that the reach is far more significant than it is in some of the other areas that we are talking about, so it would be interesting to figure out what the specific dynamics are in these different areas.

Africa is, in fact, a global leader now in terms of adoption of mobile telephony and that the language that is being used to describe this revolution is in terms of superlatives, and when you look at the rate of growth over the last half-decade it is quite mind boggling. It's probably the fastest adoption of technology anywhere, in terms of the speed with which it has been adopted right across the continent. Africa is becoming a leader in some of the functionalities that come out of mobile telephony. Two examples come to mind where Africans are in the forefront, in terms of innovation and leap-frogging.

One is mobile banking, with M-Pesa and other similar things that happen on the continent. The second area is crowd mapping and crowd sourcing, developed by Ushahidi, which started in the context of Kenya and was used extensively in the Haiti disaster. So it is not without reason that there's a significant focus on Africa and mobile telephony and some of the things that can come out of there.

But we haven't seen a lot of work on the political impact of mobile telephony, perhaps because some people are less enamoured of the rhetoric.

It's important to look at some of the critiques in terms of this impact being overly deterministic. There is also concern about the kind of theoretical naïveté that seems to surround some of these discussions, as though mobile telephony by itself can be that magic bullet, without understanding the broader system within which it functions.

I think that technologically, many tend to be preoccupied with narrow, empirical questions, such as how many Web sites are there, how many people have mobile phones, what are the number of phones and so on.

But there has not been a lot of work done about the impact of mobile phones on politics and political behaviour. Much of it has centered around cultural and social aspects of technology, social



networking and so on, and we did hear a little bit about the youth and how they use these technologies.

What I want to do is to try to address some of these critiques, as I try to explore the question of mobile telephony in the Ghanaian context. I specifically want to look at the extent to which the optimism about the democracy/mobile telephony nexus is borne out in reality in the Ghanaian context.

For example, we will look at the relationship between citizen utilization and political engagement and explore questions around how mobile telephony becomes a conduit for interest aggregation, for political mobilization and for civic vigilance, and the extent to which it provides a tool for some alternative forms of resistance.

And of course, we look at the extent to which centres of power incorporate technology for their own political purposes as well.

The telephone has traditionally been a marker of power. For those of you who would have been in African offices a couple of decades ago, you know that you would have had a phone sitting in a particular office and that there was a certain correlation between power and the location of phone.

This has been the case from colonial to post-colonial times, and so it's always been a symbol of power.

For a lot of people, this was also a marker of social differentiation, particularly in the context where getting a fixed line was a huge challenge. But in the last couple of decades, following the liberalization of the telecom industry, we began to see a change in that relationship. For the early adopters cell phones were still very much markers of status and I think you still see that in contexts where mobile use is not as extensive. And the urban/rural divide that we've heard about still reflects some of that paradigm.

But in the Ghanaian case, it's significant to point out that mobile telephony now accounts for about ninety-nine percent of telephone access in the country, and the latest figures I have are from

February of 2013, which suggest that the penetration rate is about 102 percent, compared to about one percent for fixed lines.

In terms of subscriptions, the figures are over 26 million for a population of 25 million. And it's no longer unusual in most Ghanaian rural communities to see phones. There is the question about how many people use a single phone, how many people have more than one or two or three, but the reality is that it's quite extensive in terms of penetration.

Quality of service is a different matter that we can talk about. But in terms of penetration, this is significant.

This compares to broadband penetration (and so I am not talking about fixed lines), wireless broadband access for internet, which is about 23 percent in Ghana, which is considered to be the leader on the African continent in terms of penetration of broadband. The figure is also favourably comparable to what it is in the developed world.

So there's no question about the extent of mobile telephony's spread. But what is the impact on politics?

I look at it in terms of the extent to which it has enabled articulation of voices by citizens who otherwise wouldn't have that. And this is where I think we have to look at it in terms of the convergence of radio, television, and mobile telephony.

This was clearly brought up in the context of call-in programs which are not only very common in all places in the country but also on the continent. And what talk radio has allowed is citizens being able to inject their voices into political discussions.

I'm cognizant of the fact that the particular breed of individual who does this is different, so that has to be borne in mind. But for the politically active citizen the mobile phone has created a new venue within which to express himself or herself.

It allows ordinary citizens to have their voices in the political, public discourses, which are no longer exclusive preserves of particular individuals or elites. And it further allows for some contestation

of what is the received wisdom, which tends to be the elite discourse, and so now you are able to have people challenge that.

If a Minister says, "We've constructed the road in this community," you have members of the community who are able to call in and say 'I'm standing right in front of the location and I don't see what you're talking about.' There is an instantaneity in terms of the discourse and the response that comes with this.

The other dimension I want to touch on is that mobile telephony is not always an exemplar of what it is touted to be. The argument is that it becomes this venue for deliberative political discourse. But in some areas it changes the threshold for political conflict. There is no longer a chance to be deliberative; people are able to respond immediately to things, which can raise the political temperature in a lot of places. It allows quick mobilization of supporters of political forces.

So in Ghana, for example, there have been instances where two members of two different political parties are having a discussion at a radio station, it gets very heated, phone calls are made, supporters gravitate toward a venue, police have to be called in, and so on. So as much as it allows for that kind of deliberative, public space to happen, you also have these other dimensions that I think we need to look at.

One of the biggest areas is citizen journalism and civic vigilance. For example, during elections, various media organizations were tabulating their own results and releasing them at the same time as officials of the Electoral Commission were doing theirs, allowing for some kind of cross checking of the evidence. You see situations where people are able to instantaneously verify and challenge the results in ways that weren't the case before.

I think the vigilance part is important. A couple of examples: One had to do with a judge, a magistrate of the Ghanaian system, who was accused of bribery by some citizens. He vehemently denied it.

Now in the old system, the authoritative voice of the magistrate would have held sway. But what happened was that citizens had recorded the conversation: they recorded the magistrate asking, and they recorded the receipt of the funds on their cell phone.

There are a lot of places now in Ghana where you are asked to turn off your cell phone or take your cell phone off before you enter into conversations with people in certain positions and so the private-public divide has been assailed as a result of these devices.

The technology also has video capture capabilities, it has photographic abilities that allow people, as in one case now going on, to claim that they were slapped by military personnel. The military is denying it, but there are videos of the incidents. And depending on how you interpret it, the hand just touched the cheek, it was a slap!

But citizens obviously have the potential to be able to determine who is speaking the truth.

Finally, I want to touch on trans-nationalism. There is now discussion of the fact that people leave their home but they don't leave their politics behind. And with a lot of Ghanaians, wherever they meet, the conversation will probably start with food and end up with politics.

And so people are very much involved in the politics of home and this is something that I've seen in the last two election cycles, where you've had the crafters of political strategies who are located abroad who were very much engaged in discussions about how to deal with things at home.

And the reason is because somebody on the campaign trail could still phone somebody outside Ghana and people can engage with them in ways that would not otherwise be possible.

Let me conclude by saying that mobile phones actually have a form and format in Ghana's political ecology. The depth of engagement, through mobile phones, is very much based on the level of structural limitations faced by different categories of citizens, and that is absolutely important to keep in mind.

I think that the impact varies across the different dimensions of the political landscape and so, in terms of being able to call in and talk about things, in terms of being able to report misdemeanours and malfeasance and so on, you are able to do those kinds of things.

What I think has yet to fundamentally change is the very structure of political power in the country, in that these structures have not been assailed to the point where the citizens are, in fact, able to control the centres of power.

Technology-driven changes to political relationships and the legal structures have not been as extensive or as deep, and so it's important that we don't look at the technology per se, but at how much social forces are able to rupture those relationships.

Until we're able to rupture the existing structures and relationships that define centres of power, the technology will not be able to provide that force for radical political change.





# **Chinua Achebe (1930-2013)**

And Home Goes the “Teacher of Light”<sup>28</sup>

Nduka Otiono<sup>29</sup>

I first encountered the venerable Chinua Achebe on the pages of his oft-neglected little masterpiece, *Chike and the River* (1966). The book, republished abroad for the first time after three decades of its initial publication by a small press in Nigeria, is part of the corpus of four books for children produced by the author whose bestselling novel

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<sup>28</sup> This epithet is from the title of a book by Tijan M. Sallah and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. 2003. *Chinua Achebe, Teacher of Light: A Biography*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

<sup>29</sup> Dr. Nduka Otiono, a Banting Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute of African Studies, Carleton University, Canada, was Senior Research Assistant to Professor Chinua Achebe at Brown University, USA. A shorter version of this tribute had been published in *The News* magazine (<http://pmnewsnigeria.com/2013/04/02/achebe-and-i/>), and reproduced online by Nigeria Village Square portal with the title “A Glimpse of Prof. Chinua Achebe through the Power of Personal Experience” at <http://nigeriavillagesquare.com/articles/a-glimpse-of-prof-chinua-achebe-through-the-power-of-personal-experiences.html>

*Things Fall Apart* somewhat overshadowed the rest of his masterpieces. The other children's books are *How the Leopard Got His Claws* (with John Iroaganachi, 1972), *The Flute* (1977), and *The Drum* (1977). But so overpowering has been the success of *Things Fall Apart* that the author's exceptional achievements as a writer of children's stories, short stories (*Girls at War and Other Stories*, 1973), and award-winning poetry are hardly mentioned in discussions of his enviable stature as "Father of African Literature" – a title that he continued to reject with characteristic self-effacement. Beyond his already documented protestations against the title, I witnessed Achebe 'award' the title to an older contemporary. We were at a meeting at Brown University discussing the organization of an event, "Conversations in Africana: Voice and Memory in Poetic Imagination,"<sup>30</sup> moderated by me. It featured Achebe himself, former poet laureate of Louisiana Brenda Marie Osbey, and Gabriel Okara, nonagenarian poet and one of the oldest writers alive. Professor Achebe, happy that his abiding desire to share the stage with Gabriel Okara, whose work he admired greatly, was coming into fruition, said to me between his trademark soft smiles and verbal play: "People often call me the Father of African literature; the title should actually go to Dr. Gabriel Okara. He is our father."

Yet the evidence of literary history supports the ascription of the appellation "Father of African Literature" to Achebe. From his own account in the chapter "The Empire Fights Back" in *Home and Exile*, to the submissions of eminent scholars of African literature including Nadine Gordimer (2013), Lyn Innes (2006), Kwame Anthony Appiah (2013), Douglas Killam (2000), Charles Larson (2013), and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2013), the author of *Things Fall Apart* and the first editor of Heinemann African Writers series emerges as the first African writer who, to appropriate Appiah's words in a recent tribute, "established, for those who wanted to write fiction in English

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<sup>30</sup> For a full video recording of the event see <http://vimeo.com/54372463> (accessed March 29, 2013).



about African life, the first great model of how it could be done." And "acted as midwife to scores of other writers."<sup>31</sup> While cognizant of Africa's great indigenous literary tradition—oral and written—that preceded him and from which he drew inspiration, Achebe acknowledges his pioneering role in the emergence of modern African literature in this revealing excerpt from *Home and Exile* (2000: 51):

The launching of Heinemann African Writers series was like the umpire signal for which African writers had been waiting on the starting line. In one short generation an immense library of new writing had sprung into being from all over the continent and for the first time in history, Africa's future generations of readers and writers—youngsters in schools and colleges—began to read not only David Copperfield and other English classics that I and my generation had read but also works by their own writers about their own people.

I am a part of that generation of youngsters to which Achebe refers. I did not imagine then that I would meet the author whose inventive mind and magical prose inspired my love for words, my favourite in *Chike and the River* being "nincompoops" and "scallywags." I did not think then that I would meet the author whose little book left me forever thinking of Professor Chandus, the (in)famous magician, and planted in me the desire to become a writer. I encountered more of his works later, especially the early novels that defined his fame, and then at the University of Ibadan, also Achebe's alma mater, I encountered his essays and more consciously began to engage his works critically. Also at Ibadan, Dan Izevbaye, a notable critic of African literature and my professor, introduced Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and framed the context of Achebe's most influential essay, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*" (1975). Almost immediately, my admiration for Achebe soared. Inspired and buoyed by Achebe's own achievements and the literary accomplishments of other pioneers such as J.P. Clark, Christopher

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<sup>31</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah. "Achebe Took Literature About Africans Global" <http://www.theroot.com/views/achebe-took-literature-about-africans-global> (Accessed March 23, 2013).

Okigbo, Mabel Segun, and Wole Soyinka, and aided by my favorite professor and mentor at Ibadan, Isidore Okpewho, I collaborated with a few classmates to establish The Storytellers Club.<sup>32</sup>

But it was not until during my career as a journalist with *ThisDay* newspaper that I had the opportunity of meeting *the Man* in August 1999. He was visiting home after nine years in exile following a life-changing auto crash on March 22, 1990. The remarkable trip to see Achebe in his hometown of Ogidi evoked the title of James Baldwin's 1965 psychological short story "Going to Meet the Man."<sup>33</sup> My initial anxiety melted on my actual encounter with him. His simplicity and unassuming, accommodating nature ignited confidence in me and fired me on through my assignment. The support of members of Achebe's close-knit family made my mission easier. The report, "Homecoming of a Master Storyteller" was published afterwards in *ThisDay*, the Sunday paper. How well-received the story turned out was manifested in my first meeting with Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, then-World Bank executive, and now Nigeria's Finance Minister. In search of photographs for *Chinua Achebe: Teacher of Light* (2003), a biography of Achebe which Dr. Okonjo-Iweala co-authored with Tijan M. Sallah, Gambian writer and economist, she came to me referencing my *ThisDay* story. More importantly, one year after that report, Achebe sent me a surprise invitation to his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday at Bard College in the U.S. I was again invited to Frankfurt

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<sup>32</sup> My first stories, some of which I later revised and collected into my first book, *The Night Hides with a Knife* (1995), were written and shared in the creative writing class taught by Isidore Okpewho as well as The Storytellers Club workshops in the mid 1980s at Ibadan. Like Achebe and his contemporaries who as students at Ibadan had published a students' magazine called *The Horn*, edited by J.P. Clark, we published *Echoes*, which I edited. Rather subconsciously, like many other contemporaries of mine at Ibadan, Achebe and his cohort of pioneers highly influenced and shaped my intellectual development and that of many others in my generation.

<sup>33</sup> Besides the eventfulness of finally meeting "the Man", the trip offered another gift in the form of an encounter with a street vendor at Upper Iweka, a popular commercial bus transit in Onitsha, Eastern Nigeria. The street vendor's name was Smokey Joe, and I could not help thinking of how Achebe could have re-invented him in a story. Smokey Joe later provided the creative spur for my doctoral dissertation on street stories in postcolonial Nigeria.

when Professor Achebe received the prestigious German Book Trade Peace Prize (2002), and had the opportunity for my first long interview with him. It was published in *The Insider* magazine.

Professor Achebe's generous spirit and deep sense of appreciation of little things were legendary. At the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration at Bard College, I recall highlights from some of the tributes which included the often quoted excerpt from Nelson Mandela's tribute—"the writer in whose company the prison walls collapsed." Amongst other memorable testimonies was Nuruddin Farah's recollection of a trip to Ogidu to visit Achebe at the latter's invitation. According to the Somali writer: "A day before they parted, they talked about the most mundane of matters: money." In the course of their discussion Achebe learnt that Farah had difficulties accessing money in his account at a bank in Jos which had accrued from Farah's two years' salary for teaching at the University of Jos. In response, revealed Farah, "Achebe went upstairs to his rooms and returned shortly with a cheque in pounds sterling to be drawn at a bank of my choice." Farah added: "It was thanks to this seed money that I was in the comfortable position of being able to set home in The Gambia to begin serious work on my second trilogy, *Blood in the Sun*, of which *Maps* is the first, *Gifts* the second, and *Secrets* the third."<sup>34</sup>

I got to know the master storyteller more closely and to benefit from his generosity when I joined him at Brown University as a postdoctoral fellow and Senior Research Assistant to him. The negotiation of the terms of my fellowship gave me the opportunity to witness the compassionate consciousness that created that memorable character Unoka, Okonkwo's "lazy" father, whom many would loathe and describe as a loafer in *Things Fall Apart*. From the moment Professor Achebe suggested, at a private meeting after the first Achebe Colloquium on Africa at Brown in December 2009, that he would like me to work with him, I was enchanted by his humility.

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<sup>34</sup> Excerpts from an unpublished text entitled "Chinua Achebe: A Celebration," Farah's tribute to Achebe during Achebe's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday at Bard College in 2000.

He laid out reasons why he thought I was a perfect fit for the position. And in his typical contemplative manner, asked me to take my time to consider the proposition. There was no hint of self importance in his voice in spite of his having the rare distinction of being the first living author included in *Everyman's Library*, and of *Things Fall Apart* being listed as one of "The 100 greatest novels of all time."<sup>35</sup>

As he addressed me in the presence of his son Ike, his voice as soft and reassuring as ever, I tried to suppress my excitement and the fulfillment of a childhood fantasy. But even then, I was mindful of the credence of his characteristically measured words, an acknowledgment that as a family man myself, relocating from Alberta, Canada to Rhode Island, USA, was not like going on an excursion. Throughout the negotiation for my relocation, Professor Achebe placed the interest and wellbeing of my family on the front burner. Not once did I get the impression that the work I would be doing for, and with, him mattered more than my own research and family's wellbeing. He was particularly concerned about the challenging American health insurance policy, and suggested that I not take that lightly.

Working with Professor Achebe at Churchill House, home of Africana Studies at Brown University in Providence, was like working with a guardian angel. His charming personality often lit up a room whenever he appeared, and his warm disposition often lifted one's spirit. Usually preferring to wheel himself on his mobility device as much as possible, his movement in and out of the building often caught the attention of passersby. On one particularly memorable occasion, a young man sighting him and eager to greet him mistook him for Nelson Mandela. Achebe smiled shyly, waving as he was fond of doing. Perhaps in his mind it was an ironic twist to the expe-

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<sup>35</sup> See "The 100 greatest novels of all time. The list" in *The Guardian* at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/oct/12/features.fiction> (Accessed March 24, 2013).

rience of mistaken identity since other distinguished colleagues of his were the ones usually mistaken for him. Ngugi narrates such encounters in his tribute to Achebe. He recalls how in April 1964 shortly after the publication of his first novel, *Weep Not Child*, which Achebe facilitated, he “assumed that every educated Kenyan would have heard about the novel.” But he “was woken to reality when [he] entered a club, the most frequented by the new African elite at the time, who all greeted [him] as their Kenyan author of *Things Fall Apart*.” And that was not all; Ngugi recounted further similar experiences:

Years later at Achebe’s 70<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations at Bard College attended by Toni Morrison and Wole Soyinka among others, I told this story of how Achebe’s name had haunted my life. When Soyinka’s turn to speak came, he said that I had taken the story from his mouth: he had similarly been mistaken for Chinua Achebe. The fact is that Achebe became synonymous with the Heinemann African Writers series and African writing as a whole. There is hardly any African writer of my generation who has not been mistaken for Chinua Achebe. I have had a few such encounters. Every African novel became *Things Fall Apart*, and every writer some sort of Chinua Achebe. Even a protestation to the contrary was not always successful.<sup>36</sup>

Although Achebe lived five decades of his adult life in the limelight—following the publication of *Things Fall Apart* at age 28—he never seemed comfortable with fame and attention. Indeed as Larson (2013) has noted, “Few writers live to observe the fiftieth anniversary of their novels—let alone with increasing readership.” But Achebe’s modesty forbade him from exhibiting any signs of greatness or relishing his celebrity status. He would stay quiet at most meetings, yielding space for younger colleagues to talk, and offering wise counsel only when extremely necessary. At the meetings we had to plan the annual Chinua Achebe Colloquium on Africa, a major initiative which he inaugurated at Brown University in keeping with

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<sup>36</sup> See “Chinua Achebe: The Spirit Lives – Tribute” by Ngugi wa Thiong’o (<http://www.polis.leeds.ac.uk/lucas/activities/leeds-african-studies-bulletin/chinua-achebe-the-spirit-lives-tribute-by-ngugi-wa-thiongo.php> accessed May 15, 2013).

his life's work to foster greater knowledge of Africa and to promote democracy and the rule of law, he would resist any attempts to assign prominent roles to him. He would argue instead that the Colloquium was not about him, and that he should not be made the focus.<sup>37</sup>

Ever willing to give so much of himself, official work for him was not limited to the office, not even in his twilight years and on a wheelchair. Thus he would welcome me to his residence at Warwick, Rhode Island, whenever there were urgent matters for discussion. Working closely with him enabled me to better appreciate what Professor Christie Achebe, his loving wife and scholar in her own right, had told me during our first meeting in 1999, as published in the *ThisDay* report. She described the patriarch as a very humane, caring, kind and loyal husband, and revealed that even as a paraplegic, her husband did not isolate himself to write. Mrs. Achebe added: "He still works very hard, he is still writing. Unlike me who needs solitude to work, Chinua is easily accessible even when he is writing. Once the muse is there, hardly any form of distraction will deter him from his project. He is even more accessible than me, always willing to listen to people's problems, to assist wherever he can."

Achebe was so at ease, so at peace with himself, and cautious with criticism during conversations. He would quietly say *O ka fa mada be* (it's the limit of their knowledge) in describing the shortsightedness of Nigeria's political leaders. His humility and measured words generally made most visitors, including children, comfortable in his company. He would joke and banter with my 13-year-old daughter Kika, as if he were talking with a colleague. That was not really surprising, seeing how at home he was with his own grandchildren, and also given the kind of consciousness with which he

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<sup>37</sup> Not even the occasion of his 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary celebration in Rhode Island on September 9, 2011, a modest family party, would make him embrace the spotlight and make a speech; he preferred, instead, quiet interaction with his guests and his grandchildren.

wrote *Chike and the River* and other children's books. Additionally, I could see in his unpretentious disposition the kind of cosmopolitan vision that enabled him to support his two daughters to marry non-Igbos in an often ethnically-charged society. Yet, some of his worst critics following the publication of *There Was a Country* have accused him of hating Yorubas because he criticized an icon of the Yorubas, Chief Obafemi Awolowo—something he had done multiple times in the past. Such critics are clearly oblivious of the fact that Achebe's grandchildren have Yoruba and Itsekiri blood, and therefore in "hating" Yorubas Achebe would have to hate his very family.

Achebe demonstrated the power of the written word, sparking stormy debates with his books in the hallowed precincts of the ivory tower and in street corners of urban cities and African villages. Amongst other scholars, the critic Charles Larson and Lyn Innes, with whom Achebe edited an anthology of short stories, respectively capture the significance of Achebe's work. In Larson's words, "Nigerians on the street are certainly proud of the novel [*Things Fall Apart*] and of their compatriot's fame; it is the one novel they are most likely to have read or at least to know about." For her part, Innes (2006: 196) notes that:

Achebe demonstrated that it is possible for a novelist to be creative, original, formally innovative, interrogating language and genre, and at the same time reach out to and involve a wide audience. In this sense Achebe's novels are profoundly democratic because they respect the reader as an equal, calling on his or her involvement, interpretation and judgement.

Similarly, Farah (2000) acknowledges that Achebe is

enviably the most quotable of writers, every utterance of his proving to be a gem, every single thing he has penned containing vignettes cast in the currency of his wisdom. He is a man for all occasions, a writer whom Queen Elizabeth II may quote with the same panache as a taxi driver in The Bronx, or a villager sinking a well in Onitsha.

The public outpouring over Achebe's death on the streets of Nigerian cities and in other parts of the world further prove his near rock-star

popularity as a public intellectual. It is this unusual popularity of a first-rate intellectual that earned Achebe the top spot of *Forbes* magazine's "The 40 Most Powerful Celebrities In Africa."<sup>38</sup>

Achebe's popular credentials transcend his art into his commitment as a socially conscious citizen. He operated from an ideological standpoint that invests the artist with an activist vision. In his novel *Anthills of the Savannah* he declares: "Storytellers are a threat. They threaten all champions of control, they frighten usurpers of the right-to-freedom of the human spirit – in state, in church or mosque, in party congress, in the university or wherever" (160). In the same vein he avers that, "Writers don't give prescriptions. They give headaches" (Ibid). Thus beneath his telling quiet disposition was an insurrectionary temperament against the trouble with the dysfunctional postcolonial state in Africa typified by Nigeria. He describes that trouble in the first sentence of his widely quoted political treatise as "simply and squarely a failure of leadership" (*The Trouble with Nigeria* 1). Twice rejecting national honors to protest debilitating poor leadership in Nigeria, he is unsurprisingly listed as one of the "Makers of the Twentieth Century." Besides the Man Booker International Prize for lifetime achievement, he also received the prestigious Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize, awarded to a man or woman who has made outstanding contributions to the world.

Although better known and celebrated as a distinguished novelist, Achebe's volume of poetry *Christmas in Biafra and Other Poems*, written during the Biafran War, was jointly awarded the first Commonwealth Poetry Prize. The volume grew out of an earlier collection, *Beware Soul-Brother, and Other Poems*, and both collections have also been merged in his *Collected Poems*. The poems are meditations on life and death, a collective testament to the Biafran war during

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<sup>38</sup> See Mfonobong Nsehe, "The 40 Most Powerful Celebrities In Africa." *Forbes*. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/mfonobongnsehe/2011/10/12/the-40-most-powerful-celebrities-in-africa/> (Accessed March 26, 2013).



which, together with his family, he narrowly escaped a bombing attack.

It is understandable, therefore, that Achebe's personal history of Biafra, articulated in *There Was a Country*, was perhaps the most difficult book to write. As I learned from family sources, he clung unto the project like his final testament, and as a perfectionist, worked and reworked it up to the point of its publication. The book was particularly important for him, one that he may never have finished writing because the memories were sore, and the recollections never exhaustive. Clearly, he had more to say. But being a man who preferred verbal economy to verbose pontificating, he knew he could never say *all*. It is a triumph of his resilient spirit and career that the book was published in his life-time. His sensitivity to the Biafran subject is reflected in the fact that one of the few creative works he wrote in Igbo language was his poem for his friend and marvellous poet, Christopher Okigbo. Achebe gave a most memorable reading of the poem at the Conversations in Africana event referred to earlier in this essay. A major regret of Achebe's passing at 82 on March 22, 2013, is his unfulfilled dream of personally translating his poems and the iconic novel *Things Fall Apart* into Igbo.

Achebe was always the visionary. In a twist of fate, what he said in a tribute to Ikemba Ojukwu could be said of him:

There is a cruel irony in the coincidence between the death of Ikemba Nnewi, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu (1933-2011), and a disturbing surge in sectarian violence in Nigeria. Ojukwu's life, career, and abiding commitments were shaped by just such trying circumstances as Nigeria faces today. That his death and funeral are framed by the familiar circumstances that he fought against four decades ago clearly project the significance of his life and the unsolved challenges confronting our dear homeland. A beleaguered nation sorely needs Ikemba's voice at this juncture to caution our feet against treading the path of thunder.

So does it still need Achebe's voice.

Two momentous, albeit unrelated, events, framed Achebe's exit: One was the suicide bombing at a bus terminal in Kano, reminiscent

of the 1966 events that sparked the Biafran war. The other was the 39<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the African Literature Association (ALA) in Charleston, South Carolina. While the Kano suicide bombing represents the sectarian evil that Achebe pointed out as framing Ojukwu's exit, the ALA conference celebrated African literature which Achebe championed. Such is the exit of great men, especially in the context of traditional Africa where dates were marked by special events. It is not surprising that Wole Soyinka and J.P. Clark, two of Achebe's contemporaries, have highlighted the significance of the Kano tragedy in their tribute to their departed compatriot. In their words, "These are forces that arrogantly pride themselves as implacable and brutal enemies of what Chinua and his pen represented, not merely for the African continent, but for humanity." Clark and Soyinka intoned that they "cannot help wondering if the recent insensate massacre of Chinua's people in Kano, only a few days ago, hastened the fatal undermining of that resilient will that had sustained him so many years after his crippling accident." But Clark and Soyinka ended on an optimistic note: "No matter the reality, after the initial shock, and a sense of abandonment, we confidently assert that Chinua lives. His works provide their enduring testimony to the domination of the human spirit over the forces of repression, bigotry, and retrogression."<sup>39</sup>

Certainly so; Achebe lives not only in his enduring works being celebrated universally, he lives in our hearts. Not many writers have the good fortune that a trailblazer like Achebe has enjoyed. He lived a charmed life, cheating death in the noon of his life, and living out the Igbo proverb, *Uwa mgbede ka nma* (the twilight years are sweeter). For Achebe, literature is a celebration. In his eternal transition, we do not mourn him; we celebrate *Ugonabo* – as the close family circle fondly called him – for he was twice an Eagle on the Iroko.

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<sup>39</sup> See "Chinua Achebe's death: we have lost a brother," guardian.co.uk, Friday 22 March 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/mar/22/chinua-achebe-wole-soyinka-jp-clark> (Accessed March 24, 2013).

God so loved the revered writer that he gave him 22 more years after that ghastly auto crash that crippled him. And although he was confined to a wheelchair for mobility, he stood tall in every gathering, often drawing others to bow down to greet him in reverence or to take photographs or get autographs from him as his numerous fans were wont to do at every opportunity.

Comparing himself to Achebe, the great Nelson Mandela declared in his tribute to Achebe on the occasion of his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday:

I became a lawyer when it was a profession white-ruled South Africa regarded as beyond the capacity of a black. He, by way of teaching and broadcasting, became a writer when literature was regarded by Europeans as beyond the capacity of a black. Both of us, in our differing circumstances within the same context of white domination of our continent, became freedom fighters.<sup>40</sup>

And in a nuanced affirmation of the significance of Achebe's work, Mandela declared: "His political activity landed him in periodic exile; mine landed me in prison."

I last saw Professor Achebe on Sunday, December 9, 2012 at a luncheon at his residence in Rhode Island. That day, his house was virtually full in a way that, looking back now, was a valediction of sorts. Some guests from the fourth Chinua Achebe Colloquium on Africa had insisted on visiting him before their departure. I did not realize we were seeing the influential thinker for the last time. I did not recognize that the autographed copy of *There Was a Country* he gave me that day would be his parting gift. As I stare at his autograph every now and then, I appreciate how he continues to live as a moral authority, in my world and in the world of countless other admirers. When I think of other projects inspired and nurtured by the venerable Chinua Achebe—including the Igbo Language dictionary project—I realize it would take a while to harvest these for publication, and further populate his legacy which, as President Barrack Obama

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<sup>40</sup> From an unpublished text of Nelson Mandela's goodwill message at Chinua Achebe's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration in 2000 at Bard College, USA.

notes in his tribute to Achebe, “will endure in the hearts of all whose lives he touched with the everlasting power of his art.”<sup>41</sup> So that although Ngugi (2013) has rightly proclaimed Achebe as “the single most important figure in the development of modern African literature as writer, editor, and quite simply a human being,” and Gordimer (2013) has identified Achebe’s work as “the founding creation of modern African imaginative literature, the opening act of exploration into African consciousness using traditional modes of expression along with those appropriated from colonial culture, particularly the English language,” it may still be morning yet in the unraveling of the creative genius of this Teacher of Light.

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<sup>41</sup> See “Achebe, a revolutionary author—Obama” in *The Punch* newspaper online, June 4, 2013 (<http://www.punchng.com/feature/literary-punch/achebe-a-revolutionary-author-obama/> accessed June 4, 2013).

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