

# Potential Uses of Community Radio in Political Awareness: A Proposal for Nigeria

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## Abstract

Political awareness is necessary in democracy- citizens need to know whom they will vote for, the ideals of political parties, dates set for elections, topical political debates, the electoral process, etc. This paper examines the potential uses of community radio in political awareness, especially in Nigeria where community radio is not yet in existence. The existence of community radio in other parts of Africa but not Nigeria leaves a void because there may be a lot of uses to which community radio can be put to. This study explores the “would be” relationship between community radio and political awareness especially at the grassroots in Nigeria. Using a survey of radio producers, announcers, correspondents, reporters and other broadcast professionals who understand the concept and have had some experience with community radio elsewhere, the study finds that effective programme selection and scheduling will be essential to raising political awareness in Nigerian communities when such stations start operation. Also, interactive approaches in radio programme production will give listeners a chance to clear their doubts and seek illumination on complex issues. Radio producers, announcers, correspondents and reporters should realise that community radio will be a viable tool in raising political awareness in Nigeria, only if used appropriately. Lessons from other countries (where strategies in raising political awareness via community radio have been successful) should be learnt and used when community radio sets foot in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Community radio, political awareness, democracy, grassroots, citizens, potential, proposal

## 1. Introduction

Community radio attracts a lot of interest and research especially concerning its role in rural development. The potentials of community radio can be enormous or otherwise, thus it is important to ascertain the “would be” influence of community radio among rural dwellers in Nigeria based on the experience of those who have worked on community radio in other countries where similar conditions exist, such as Ghana. Such a proposal is important so that regulatory agencies such as the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and broadcast professionals in Nigeria, on the whole, will realise the awesome potential which community radio has if used appropriately when it sets foot in Nigeria. Also this proposal might speed up the drive towards establishing community radio stations in Nigeria. In countries where it has been used, community radio serves people at the grassroots who often have peculiar characteristics especially in developing countries. These characteristics include hunger, poverty, disease, illiteracy, traditional mind sets, laborious methods of production, etc., which translate to the economic, health, and social implications which community radio may bring to bear. Apart from these characteristics, there is also the political influence of community radio. People at the grassroots too have a role to play as they too decide who gets elected into public office as well as expressing their opinion about the actions of government on policies that affect them. During election campaigns, political candidates and their parties make a conscious effort to convince the populace in order to gain support. During this period various media is used to reach the diverse groups of people in the country depending on their media use habits. At this juncture it is pertinent to ascertain the contributions that community radio will have in the political sphere, especially on political awareness. In Nigeria, the input of purposively selected broadcast professionals about the potential influence of community radio on political awareness elsewhere is examined since community radio is yet to be used in Nigeria. These selected professionals are knowledge-able in the field and have drawn from the experiences in other countries where community radio has been used. Community radio stations operate in other African countries, thus this study uses the experience in these places as a springboard to draw up a proposal for Nigeria.

A lot has been said about community radio and its ability to facilitate dialogue among people in localities.

However, very little is said and known about the relationship between community radio and political awareness especially in a developing context. These relationships need to be elaborated. In places where community radio already exists practical examples can be given. On the basis of these experiences, projections into the future can be made for countries like Nigeria that are yet to embrace community radio. Politics is expected to be all inclusive, bringing together the elite as well as the masses in rural settings. Thus, since community radio operates at the grassroots, in what ways can it facilitate communication of a political nature? It is also pertinent to highlight the inherent attributes of community radio which can facilitate political awareness as well as the problems which may arise when community radio stations take up the task of handling politics.

## 2. Conceptual clarification

### 2.1 Political Awareness

Political awareness refers to knowledge levels among the electorate and other concerned actors. When knowledge levels are low, it leaves much to be desired. Zaller (1992, p. 21) writes that political awareness is a measure of media reception. Reception means getting the message as well cognition. When the audience receive political information, it may increase their awareness of such issues. Furthermore, political awareness can be measured by testing political knowledge held by the audience. Zaller (1996, p. 20) throws more light on the relationship between mass media and political awareness when he writes that when mass media,

*...carry competing political messages, members of the public who are heavily exposed to one message tend to be heavily exposed to its opposite as well.*

Exposure to messages in the media is a determinant to a large extent of awareness. One of the major tasks which mass media is saddled with is information dissemination. There are a wide range of subject which media disseminate information about. Political awareness is important especially in a democracy and it is important to ascertain at some point or other whether the supply streams are constantly flowing in order to keep political awareness at an appreciable level.

### 2.2 Radio

Radio is a wireless transmission which only has the audio element. Thus radio can only be listened to. This nature of radio makes the production of programmes cost effective because fewer equipment is required than television. Furthermore, radio receivers are often simplistic in nature thus cheap and affordable especially to rural people. Battery operated radio sets make users less dependent on electricity supply and the medium is portable. Portability of the medium ensures that listeners incorporate the medium into their occupations. They are able to listen while they work instead of interrupting their daily routines. Above all, radio is very useful in multi-ethnic developing countries like Nigeria, because it is flexible. Programmes can be produced in various languages. Thus each ethnic group is given a sense of belonging and inclusion.

### 2.3 Community radio

Community radio is an important concept in the uses of radio especially in developing countries of the world where there is a dire need to improve on the existing status quo. In the first place, radio use is popular at the grassroots because the medium is: affordable; has low production costs; flexible; battery operated; requires partial attention; and its signals can reach remote areas. These inherent characteristics of radio give credence to the concept of community radio.

Community radio serves the needs of small groups and localities which hitherto would not have had radio service dedicated to them. Since this radio service is dedicated to them, it addresses the daily issues that affect people in these places. As a result it channels efforts at improving the livelihoods of such people in the economic, social, health and political sphere. The concept of community radio brings the audience into the ideation and production of programmes. Members of the audience are not only listeners but active participants in the production of programmes that are broadcast. Thus they have a sense of belonging and the content of the programmes are more relevant and useful to wider sections of the community.

Community radio distinguishes itself because it: takes a non-profit approach; independent; owned and controlled by the community; and encourages participation by members of the community. The non-profit component of community radio, ensures that it does not bow to commercial pressures which are brought to bear on radio by advertisers, market forces, competitors and ownership. In the absence of commercial pressure, community radio serves only the needs and interest of its immediate audience. Decisions are made about programming based the relevance of the latter in the community. Thus community radio is independent of government, companies, advertisers, and other groups that may influence its content. Care is taken not to digress from the independence which community radio should have. In the operation of community radio, whatever monetary gains are made are ploughed back into the running and management of the station. The decentralised nature of community radio ensures participation by the audience. In other words, the audience is brought together with the broadcasters and they work hand in hand. This is a key principle of participatory development. Decentralisation in this respect gives a voice to the voices of local people who would ordinarily have never been heard. In this arrangement, they are given the opportunity to express themselves; share their problems; discuss solutions to problems that affect the wider community as a whole and; share success stories.

Community radio is defined in various ways by a number of authors. However, there is unity in these definitions that community radio focuses on localities and operates among the ordinary lives of local people. Wadia (2007, p. 11) writes that,

*Community radio, as distinct from public service broadcasting, serves to bring small communities together, focuses on common man's day-to-day concerns and helps in realizing local aspirations. In this sense it aims to contribute to the lives of the local community, through the content that is created by the people and for the people of the community*

The communities in which community radio operates often have cultural similarities so that the operation of the radio station will not be cumbersome. The day to day activities of people in these local communities often escape the notice of public service broadcasting because such stations have a wider field of coverage and cannot go down to issues concerning local communities. Vigil (1997, p. 3) explains the concept of community radio saying,

*When radio fosters the participation of citizens and defends their interests; when it reflects the tastes of the majority; when it truly informs; when it helps resolve the thousand and one problems of daily life; when all ideas are debated in its programs and all opinions are respected; when cultural diversity is stimulated over commercial homogeneity; when women are main players in communication and not simply a pretty voice; when no type of dictatorship is tolerated; when everyone's words fly without discrimination or censorship; that is community radio.*

Community radio supports a democracy of voices. All voices are given a chance to be heard instead of the existing status quo (especially among developing communities in Africa) where women are relegated to the background. The definition by Vigil (2007) adds a gender perspective to the definition of community radio. Women form a significant portion of African communities, yet they are often silent in many affairs. Furthermore, Tabing (2002, p. 5) writes that community radio,

*... one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community...., the community can be territorial or geographical – a township, village, district or island and can also be a group of people with common interests, who are not necessarily living in one defined territory.*

Community radio is owned and run by the people whom the radio station serves. This precludes the fact that community radio is controlled or operated by external groups. Members of the community are the ones who understand issues that affect them and are in a better position to pilot their own affairs. Tabing (2002) highlights the fact that the group of people which community radio serves has common interests. Carlos Arnaldo in Fraser and Restrepo (2001, p. 12) writes that,

*Community radio is a social process or event in which members of the community associate together to design programmes and produce and air them, thus taking on the primary role of actors in their own destiny, whether this be for something as common as mending fences in the neighbourhood, or a community-wide campaign on how to use clean water and keep it clean, or agitation for the election of new local leaders.*

*The emphasis is on the ownership of democratic and development efforts by the members of the community themselves and the use of media, in this case radio, to achieve it. In every sense, this is participatory communication... It is above all a process, not a technology, not merely a means...*

*[It is] the community speaking to each other and acting together for common goals*

With various forms of modern media, communities are bombarded with information from elsewhere. There is very little or no chance of dialogue within the community. These communities hardly (if ever) speak with one another. Community radio creates an opportunity for information sharing and discussion among people in their localities. As matters arise, they are better off putting heads together to proffer solutions and learn from the successes and failures of one another.

### **3. Statement of the problem**

Community radio stations exist in many African countries and are beneficial in development projects. However, Nigeria is yet to adopt the use of community radio stations. Despite efforts by international agencies to facilitate the establishment of community radio, there are still no community radio stations in Nigeria. Duer, Reuben and Salazar (2004) write that in 2002, the World Bank provided the Multi-Country Development Marketplace grant to provide an enabling environment for the establishment of community radio stations in Malawi, Zambia, Ghana and Nigeria. Furthermore, in April 2003, a workshop of expert practitioners was held to identify pilot countries to which community radio sector support would be extended via bank lending. These efforts are yet to yield the desired results in Nigeria.

With increased political activity in Nigeria since its return to democracy on May 29<sup>th</sup> 1999, it is pertinent to examine the relationship between community radio and political awareness in other countries where community radio exists. These experiences may be replicated in Nigeria given that similar conditions exist between African countries where community radio is successful. It is hoped that this will stimulate the need for community radio in Nigeria given its role in political awareness. This study identifies the way(s) in which community radio can facilitate political awareness especially via programming; the inherent qualities of community radio that make it effective in creating political awareness and; the problems that may be encountered when community radio is used to create political awareness.

### **4. Research questions**

- In what way(s) can community radio facilitate political awareness?
- What inherent qualities of community radio make it effective in creating political awareness?
- What problems may be encountered when community radio is used to create political awareness?

### **5. Theoretical framework**

#### **5.1 Democratic Participant Theory: a theory of participation.**

The Democratic Participant Theory supports a bottom to top approach instead of the dominant top to bottom approach. The theory encourages access to media by potential users. Thus state controlled and commercial media systems which hinder access do not facilitate community wide participation in the media. Also the theory warns that media should not be left in the hands of professionals alone. Professionals may not succeed if they do not consider the needs and interests of the audience. The central idea in the Democratic Participant Theory is recounted by McQuail (2000, p. 160) thus,

*This theory found expression in the 1960s and 1970s in pressure for local and community radio and television. It challenged the dominance of centralized, commercialized, state-controlled and even professionalized media. It favoured media that would be small in scale, non-commercial and often committed to a cause. Participation and interaction are key concepts.*

Although the Democratic Participant Theory originated in the 1960s and 1970s, it explains the thrust of community radio in developing countries (like Nigeria) today. In the face of centralised, commercial, state-controlled and professional media, ordinary people do not have a chance to be heard. They are not given the opportunity to use media to serve their own needs. Someone else is saddled with the task of channelling information to them, be it useful or otherwise. McQuail (1987, p. 122) addresses this problem when he notes that,

*... the central point of a democratic-participant theory lies with the needs, interests and aspirations of the active 'receiver' in a political society. It has to do with the right to relevant information, the right to answer back, the right to use the means of communication for interaction in small-scale settings of community, interest group, sub-culture*

The Democratic Participant Theory holds that the interests of mainstream media, media owners, media professionals, advertisers and other commercial organisations runs against those of local people in communities that are largely unheard of. Often mainstream media is unable to accommodate minorities, especially people in far flung communities. Thus there is the need to encourage participation in the media and interaction among people who are often ignored in the scheme of things. Community radio is the answer to this paradox. Among other things, community radio encourages participation and interaction among people in the localities which it serves.

## **6. Community Radio in Ghana**

The first community radio station in Africa, Homa Bay Community Radio, was established in Kenya in 1982. Although this first community radio was short lived, it is a landmark in the development of community radio in Africa. Elsewhere on the African continent, Fortune, Chungong and; Kessinger (2011) identify the following community radio stations: in Liberia, Radio Gbarnga and Radio Gbehzohn; in Guinea, Mamou Rural Radio and Kindia Rural Radio and; in Sierra Leone, Radio Gbafth and Eastern Radio. Community radio is popular in South Africa too with some of the following stations: Vryburg Community Radio in the North west Province; Vukani Community Radio in the Eastern Cape; Unitra Community Radio and; Botlokwa Community Radio in the Northern Province. Mytton (2006) notes that there were more than 70 community radio stations in South Africa in the year 2000, and about 100 in various parts of West Africa. Ghana became the first black nation where colonial rule came to an end and has also taken giant strides in the application of community radio to local needs. A lot can be learnt by other African countries (where similar conditions exist) from the experience of community radio broadcasters in Ghana.

The first independent community radio station, Radio Ada, started operation in February 1999. Originally, test broadcasts of Radio Ada began in 1998. The United Nations (UNESCO) provided some financial support which facilitated the launch of Radio Ada in order to enhance digitisation at the grassroots in Ghana. According to White (2007), Radio Ada was the first community radio station in the Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN). In the 2007 the GCRN had a total of eight (8) community radio stations. However, the GCRN developed a plan for the licensing of 97 additional community radio stations in Ghana. The aims of the GCRN are noteworthy and White (2007, p. 2) quotes thus,

*... enhance the use and build the capacity of Community Radio to enable marginalized communities and groups to generate and share their knowledge and experience, to participate in discourse and decision-making at every level, to develop the richness of their culture, and to strengthen their communities as part of the national and global family.*

Radio Ada serves as the only source of information because a significant number of people within its range do not have access to television for a number of reasons. White (2007) notes that 50% of the 600,000 people (in 150 towns and villages) served by Radio Ada are illiterate. The programming format at Radio Ada is quite broad and includes: news, interview, summaries, call in (also known as phone in); discussion, talk shows, etc. However, Quarmyne in White (2007) insists that the phone in programme is significant because it facilitates information sharing, issues raised, discussion and news that is important to the community. On the whole it is an opportunity for members of the community to air their views about issues that are important to the community. Also, it is a means by which members of the community learn by listening to one another.

The programmes produced on Radio Ada are made with the participation of people in the respective communities which the station serves. These people make vital input into the programmes, thus they are relevant to the community. On Radio Ada, narrow casts are made to suit fishermen, women, drivers, farmers, etc. This way, no member of the community is left out in the content of the radio station. Every group can identify with specific programmes on the station. Furthermore, it is important to note that programmes on Radio Ada are designed to suit the professions of people in the community. Towards this end, the programmes are used as a vital resource.

The broadcast operations at Radio Ada include: programme recording, news production, marketing, music programmes, and programmes on conflict prevention. Radio Ada has a staff strength of fifty (50) with most being volunteers. Some of these volunteers are officials from government ministries. However, the radio station has trained five hundred (500) on its operation since inception.

The social significance of community radio stations in Ghana like Radio Ada cannot be understated. In the first place, since many people in the communities which it serves are illiterate, community radio serves as a tool for the creation of functional literacy in Ghana. Furthermore, community radio facilitates the work of government ministries by reaching people via the airwaves thus eliminating the need for and costs of face to face encounters. According to White (2007) Radio Ada reaches 600,000 people spread across 150 towns and villages. Furthermore, Duer, Reuben and Salazar (2004, p. 2) emphasize this point when they write that,

*For peoples who have a strong oral tradition (throughout Sub-Saharan Africa and indigenous populations of Latin America, for example), and for the great majority of poor people in developing countries who are illiterate, radio programming is especially vital for connectivity.*

Given the rural nature of these areas, community radio is handy in reaching far flung areas. Apart from connectivity, Radio Ada helps in enforcing hunting laws, management of fisheries as well as forests. Agyeman in White (2007) recounts the coverage of a court case involving a man who stole beach sand to mould brick. When Radio Ada reported the proceedings and the eventual fine imposed on the offender, people in the community were deterred from stealing sand from the beaches. Furthermore, Agyeman in White (2007) adds that Radio Ada gives a voice to the voiceless. Ordinarily, people at the grassroots are unable to express themselves regarding local conditions which affect them. With community radio, they now have an avenue to discuss local issues which were hitherto swept under the carpet. As a voice to the voiceless, community radio often encourages audience participation in various forms. Mgibisa (2005, p.47) elaborates on the various forms of audience participation on community radio thus,

*This aspect of participation is not just through letters, phone-ins, musical requests, on-air competitions, greetings and dedications and simple conversations, but the involvement and participation of community members in the actual design, implementation and evaluation of stations' programming schedules.*

Community radio is useful in discussing a number of development issues such as poverty, small scale businesses,

the five childhood killer diseases, HIV/AIDS, conflict, climate change, bush burning, etc. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2012, p.2-3) arrived at the following conclusions regarding the usefulness of community radio as a knowledge tool. Community radio can be used for:

*Speaking to communities in local languages using terms and phrases that are easily understood; providing two-way interactive social learning through listening clubs, call-in shows, and other forms of exchange; enabling the communication and exchange of knowledge between people who need it, e.g. rural farmers, in a consumable, deployable and non-threatening way; communicating local knowledge, needs and demands beyond the community to inform policy, research, and other communities; providing the only media available to communities that have little or no access to other methods of conveying information and knowledge; bringing together people from frequently disconnected stakeholder groups such as livelihoods, community leaders, organizations and governance.*

Drawing from the above, community radio is useful in: making messages linguistically relevant to communities; interactivity and immediate feedback on phone in programmes as well as other forms of exchange; enabling knowledge exchange; communicating local knowledge and needs; informing policy and research; using what local communities have to exchange information than using unreachable methods; bring people together for useful purposes who otherwise would have been disconnected. Apart from the uses of community radio stated in preceding sections, Climate Airwaves was set up by the Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN) to share experiences of adaptation with decision makers as well as the populace in other towns and village in Ghana. Other community radio projects dealing with climate include: Bravados dos Zambeze (Zambezi Braves) Disaster Risk radio in Mozambique and Krishi Radio in Bangladesh which supports farmers adaptive capacity to climate change. Similarly, since community radio is applied to these development issues, it may be useful to examine its potentials for political awareness. Elsewhere Fortune, Chungong and; Kessinger (2011) sought to establish a relationship between community radio community radio, women and ICTs in West Africa (Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea). Among other things, the study sought to find out whether programming on community radio stations takes into account the preferences of women and improves their access to information. It also sought to find out whether the increasingly popular methods of interactive radio broadcasting such as phone in programmes and text messaging engage women in appropriate dialogue.

## **7. The essence of Community Radio**

Community radio is important especially among impoverished groups because it avails a number of advantages. These benefits of community radio make it rise above state owned centralised media and other commercially controlled radio stations which bow to market forces. With the latter, voices at the grassroots are unheard and they do not have a chance to express their needs and aspirations. The essence of commercial radio is captured in the points listed below.

- Mobilisation
- Local content
- Accessibility
- Scope
- Bottom-top approach
- Participation
- Dialogue
- Cost effective
- Local needs

### **7.1 Mobilisation**

Community radio is a viable channel for rallying support among the rural populace for a number of causes- social, political, religious, health, cultural, etc. Through community radio, people are enlightened to rise up and take a particular course of action that is beneficial to the populace as well as the initiators of the message. The role of community radio in political mobilisation is essential not only during political campaigns but also when contentious issues arise and there is need to rally support for or otherwise. In this way, people in far flung

communities become active participants in political discourse.

## 7.2 Local content

With community radio, most of the programmes produced focus on issues that affect the immediate environment. In other words, the programmes produced and broadcast are about the community. When issues arise in the community, these become the basis for discussion on radio. This enables members of the community address matters that affect them because radio highlights these issues. Thus they are conscious of issues in the community. With this arrangement, people in the community look within because radio makes them aware of the matters affecting them.

## 7.3 Accessibility

Local people have a chance to be heard. With community radio, local people can express their needs and intentions. They can also be a part of problem sharing during discussion programmes. This is not often the case with centralised commercial radio which looks at other interests other than the needs of the local people which community radio addresses. When radio is commercial it often serves the interests of advertisers and owners. These pressures are often difficult to avoid. Thus the interests of people in local communities are relegated to the background and the people do not have access to radio.

## 7.4 Scope

The scope of community radio is the issues that affect the local people. This is often beneficial as other types of radio stations cannot effectively cover the many communities which fall under their area of operation. Given a commitment to serve the local area, community radio is saddled with a reasonable area of operation. Issues that are alien to the community are not relevant since there are local issues waiting to be addressed in the various broadcast programmes.

## 7.5 Bottom-top approach

Community radio takes a bottom to top approach. Instead of broadcasting to the community it broadcasts with the community. It gives local people a sense of belonging since they are part of programme ideation. Programmes are produced after consultation with members of the community. They are the ones who decide the type of programmes they want which will be useful to them. As opposed to the top-down approach, programmes are broadcast to communities because they are perceived to be useful and in some cases these commercial radio stations do not have the interest of communities at heart. The bottom to top approach suggests a form of consultation and community participation.

## 7.6 Participation

Community radio brings both the broadcasters and members of the community together. In the first place, community radio is owned and controlled by the local people it serves. They have a hand in the decisions and operation of the station because it is meant to serve them. Thus, they are the ones who can direct its operation in order to achieve the goals for which it was set up. Broadcast professionals are there to handle the technical issues which are involved with radio broadcasting. Without them, the community cannot operate the station. Thus, both groups work hand in hand.

## 7.7 Dialogue

The operation of community radio suggests dialogue. Dialogue is used here in two ways. In the first place, the type of dialogue referred to here is dialogue between broadcast professionals and the community as well as between representatives of the community and ordinary members of the community. Community radio is owned and controlled by the community, thus there needs to consultation at every stage of the operation process. Furthermore, a second kind of dialogue is suggested here. The programmes produced on community radio should elicit a response from members of the community. The programmes which focus on local issues must not fall on deaf ears but receive feedback. This feedback to the community radio station directs the content and flow



of broadcast programmes.

### 7.8 Cost effective

The operation of community radio is simplistic and brings cost to the barest minimum. Since radio is basically for the ear, broadcast equipment are not as cumbersome as television or other new media. This makes community radio practical and workable among impoverished communities in Nigeria. The cost effective nature of community radio often inspires donors and development agencies to use the medium as a component of its approaches.

### 7.9 Local needs

The needs of local people are often ignored by radio stations which have a large scope to cover. Due pressure from government, commercial interests as well as owners, the interests of local people are often unattended to by many radio stations. With this scope it is largely impossible to focus on the many communities that pick up the signals of the radio station.

## 8. Related empirical studies

### 8.1 The Effects of Political Talk Radio on Political Attitude Formation: Exposure versus Knowledge

In the study, “The Effects of Political Talk Radio on Political Attitude Formation: Exposure versus Knowledge” Lee and Capella (2001) the effects of political talk radio on the formation of voters attitudes towards political leaders. The study investigates the predictions of Zaller’s model of media effects by testing comparatively, the impact of exposure and knowledge on political attitudes when people are exposed to political talk radio. According to Knight and Barker (1996) in some circumstances (such as its large audience members) political talk radio can be a determinant of public opinion and political behaviour. The study used a series of five (5) surveys which ran during the primary phase of the 1996 US presidential campaign from February 21, 1996 to March 5, 1996. The research sample for the study included people who were regular listeners to political talk radio as well as those who were not. Among other things, Lee and Capella (2001) found that, “people who are more likely to receive political messages are politically more involved with one party or the other, and they seek exposure to an ideologically consistent message.” The study also found: no evidence suggesting that effect of knowledge on attitudes towards political leaders or parties; exposure is a significant predictor of political attitude and; the partisan predispositions of the audience made them ready to agree/disagree and select among partisan sources.

### 8.2 Community Radio: Performance Assessment System

Community radio stations operate along certain guidelines. Thus it is necessary to assess these radio stations from time to time to ascertain whether they are on track or have derailed. The study by Mainali, Chapagain and Subba (2009) sets yardsticks for measuring the performance of community radio stations. In the first place, community radio stations are categorised as follows: Model Community Radio (80 and above); Performing Community Radio (60 to 79); Progressive Community Radio (45-59); Evolving Community Radio (35-44) and; Failing to be Community Radio (below 35). The marks assigned to each category are a basis for assessing community radio stations. The marks referred to above are derived from a detailed assessment system based on the following criteria: Participation and ownership (20); radio governance (15); radio programmes (25); resource structure and resource management (15); Radio Station management (10); financial management (10) and; networking (5). Community radio stations are assessed based on these criteria and graded according to the marks for each criterion. The total marks which the community radio station obtains determines the type of community radio category which it belongs to as stated above.

### 8.3 Community Radio and grassroots democracy: A case study of three villages in Yogyakarta Region, Indonesia.

When people at the grassroots have access to the media they are encouraged to participate in various activities- health, social, political, cultural. Community radio is unique in the sense that the audience are not just receivers of messages but also producers of content. With the growth of community radio stations in Indonesia due to democratisation of the media, Birowo (2010) seeks to ascertain how people at the grassroots use community radio in the democratic transition in Indonesia. The study uses multiple case studies in order to assess the use of

community radio at the grassroots level. The study finds that community radio is use by civil society at the grassroots level to empower people who have never had the opportunity to express themselves. Secondly, community radio builds the capacities of local people to participate in decision making. Finally community radio highlights the interests of marginal groups and brings them into the public sphere. If democracy is a game of numbers, community radio highlights the existence of groups which are often marginal and reminds them of their rights in society and the need to express their interests which were hitherto ignored.

## 9. Research method

This study used a survey of two hundred respondents. The population of study were radio broadcasters. By way of sampling, radio broadcasters with at least ten (10) years of work experience were selected from five states which are located in central Nigeria, namely- Benue, Taraba, Plateau, Nassarawa and Kogi. The sample was purposively selected based on respondents who have experience with community radio in other parts of Africa or the world. This purposive selection process was necessary due to the nature of the inquiry at hand. Only respondents who have experience in community radio will give valid responses to the questions posed in this study. In each of the states, there were forty (40) respondents. The area of study was chosen due to its rural nature and abundance of impoverished communities as well as high levels of political activity and participation in these areas. Many of these communities are strongholds for various political parties and express this inclination by displaying banners, posters, effigies and icons of various political parties and political figures. Thus, sampling for this study followed three stages: in the first place, the states in central Nigeria were selected due to the rural nature of many communities and high levels of participation in political activity in these areas. Secondly, radio stations in these states were identified. Thirdly, in these radio stations, experienced radio broadcasters were purposively selected and had the questionnaire administered on them. It is important to note that the radio stations in these states that were used in this study were not community radio stations but the respondents have knowledge about the operation of community radio and are in a position to answer the questions posed in the questionnaire.

## 10. Data presentation

**Table I:** Community Radio and Political Awareness

s/n	Programmes for political awareness	frequency	%tage
1	Personality interviews with political candidates	10	5
2	Discussion segments on topical political issues	50	25
3	Question and answer fora	40	20
4	Documentary on political issues and parties	35	17.5
5	Public service announcements on civic duties (voter registration and election dates)	25	12.5
6	Announcing political campaign dates and venues	15	7.5
7	Airing political advertisements	20	10
8	Estimating public opinion via vox pop	5	2.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

Table I presents a distribution of respondents according to the most frequent way in which community radio can spread political awareness via programming in community radio stations. From the table, 10 respondents representing 5 percent of the total population indicate “personality interviews with political candidates,” 50 respondents representing 25 percent of the total population indicate, “discussion segments on topical political issues,” 40 respondents representing 20 percent of the total population indicate “question and answer fora,” 35 respondents representing 17.5 percent of the total population indicate “documentary on political issues and parties,” 25 respondents representing 12.5 percent of the total population indicate “public service announcements on civic duties (voter registration and election dates),” 15 respondents representing 7.5 percent of the total population indicate “announcing political campaign dates and venues,” 20 respondents representing 10 percent of the total population indicate “airing political advertisements,” while 5 respondents representing 2.5 percent of

the total population indicate, “Estimating public opinion via vox pop.”

Programming is an important variable in political awareness. If community radio stations are to promote political awareness, the types of programmes which they produce are important especially when they are designed to achieve the set objective. Most respondents by 25 percent of the total population indicate, “discussion segments on topical political issues,” while few respondents by 2.5 percent of the total population indicate, “Estimating public opinion via vox pop” as the most frequent way in which community radio can spread political awareness.

**Table II:** Qualities of community radio

s/n	Qualities of community radio	frequency	%tage
1	Community participation	55	27.5
2	Discussion	60	30
3	Accessibility	20	10
4	Feedback from audience	15	7.5
5	Local content/issues	40	20
6	Voicing the voiceless	10	5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

Table II presents a distribution of respondents according to the most significant quality of community radio which makes it effective in spreading political awareness. From the table, 55 respondents representing 27.5 percent of the total population indicate community participation; 60 respondents representing 30 percent of the total population indicate discussion; 20 respondents representing 10 percent of the total population indicate accessibility; 15 respondents representing 7.5 percent of the total population indicate feedback from audience; 40 respondents representing 20 percent of the total population indicate local content/issues while, 10 respondents representing 5 percent of the total population indicate voicing the voiceless as the most significant quality of community radio that makes it effective in spreading political awareness.

This table addresses the ways in which the inherent qualities of community radio make it useful in promoting political awareness. It is often necessary to find out whether the inherent qualities of community radio can promote political awareness or if these qualities are opposed to it. Community radio is a universal concept and its ideals can be used in various places where it comes into operation. Most respondents by 30 percent of the total population indicate discussion while few respondents by 5 percent of the total population indicate voicing the voiceless as the most significant quality of community radio that makes it effective in spreading political awareness.

**Table III:** Problems of community radio use in political awareness

s/n	Problems	frequency	%tage
1	Highlights political divisions in the community	20	10
2	Editing and social responsibility	15	7.5
3	Inflammatory remarks	65	32.5
4	May spark unrest	5	2.5
5	Overtly partisan	25	12.5
6	Sabotage	30	15
7	Withdrawal of funding	40	20
	<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

Table III presents a distribution of respondents according to the most significant problem which might be

encountered in using community radio to spread political awareness. From the table, 20 respondents representing 10 percent of the total population indicate that community radio may highlight political divisions in the community; 15 respondents representing 7.5 percent of the total population indicate that there will be need for editing and social responsibility among the operators of community radio; 65 respondents representing 32.5 percent of the total population indicate that inflammatory remarks may be broadcast; 5 respondents representing 2.5 percent of the total population indicate that political content on community radio may spark unrest; 25 respondents representing 12.5 percent of the total population indicate that community radio may be overtly partisan; 30 respondents representing 15 percent of the total population indicate that community radio may suffer sabotage while; 40 respondents representing 20 percent of the total population indicate that community radio may have funds withdrawn by donors.

Community radio is useful in certain ways but it is not without its problems. Identifying the problems which are inherent in using community radio to spread political awareness is key to making it more efficient. Most respondents by 32.5 percent of the total population indicate that inflammatory remarks may be broadcast on community radio while few respondents by 2.5 percent of the total population indicate that political content on community radio may spark unrest.

## 11. Findings

Discussion segments on topical political issues the most frequent way in which community radio can spread political awareness. Other ways by which community radio stations can spread political awareness include: personality interviews with political candidates; question and answer fora; documentary on political issues and parties; public service announcements on civic duties (voter registration and election dates); announcing political campaign dates and venues; airing political advertisements; and estimating public opinion via vox pop.

Encouraging discussion among members of the locality is the most significant quality of community radio that makes it effective in spreading political awareness. Other qualities of community radio that makes it effective in spreading political awareness are as follows: community participation; accessibility; feedback from audience; local content/issues; and voicing the voiceless.

Inflammatory remarks on radio are the most significant problem which might be encountered in using community radio to spread political awareness. Other problems which might be encountered include the fact that community radio may: highlight political divisions in the community; tedious editing and social responsibility; spark unrest; overtly partisan; sabotage; and withdrawal of funding from donors.

## 12. Conclusion and Recommendation

Discussion is an essential aspect of awareness. When people have the opportunity to confer with others, they raise questions which may clear their doubts and reinforce knowledge acquired. Furthermore, given the opportunity to confer with others ensures a flow of information from the “knowledgeable” to the “ignorant.” Community radio facilitates political awareness by providing an avenue for discussion. Listeners to discussion programmes on community radio stations may give the audience an opportunity to learn from arguments and propositions put forth by participants in the studio. Also, the fact that these people are all part of the community gives them the same frame of reference- an ability to understand an refute or accept views expressed. Effective programme selection and scheduling is essential to raising political awareness in communities. Also, interactive approaches in radio programme production give listeners a chance to clear their doubts and seek illumination on complex issues. Radio producers, announcers, correspondents and reporters should realise that community radio is a viable tool in raising political awareness, only if used appropriately. Lessons from other countries (where strategies in raising political awareness via community radio have been successful) should be learnt.

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