

The Limits of Community Broadcasting in Nigeria: Connotations for South-North Conversations

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Abstract

Governments around the globe always desire to put policies in place to guide the operations of the communication sector. Scholars have maintained that since the advent of alternative media, community-based media have ensured media pluralism, diversity of content and the representation of society's different groups and interests. Hence, this paper investigated the extent to which government actions and inactions limited the development of appropriate channels of community broadcasting in Nigeria; and the implications of the issues for South-North conversations. We adopted the theories of change as framework because community media create the atmosphere for audience participation in relation to issues of rural and national development. This study adopted a qualitative approach making use of focus groups from different communities around Nigeria. Further, the questionnaire was used to generate quantitative data from a sample of media workers; to ascertain their perceptions of the issues surrounding community broadcasting. The results revealed that government's actions/inactions – ranging from legal constraints to delays by policy makers – are the major limits to community broadcasting in Nigeria. Therefore, recommendations are made to create conducive environment for the operation of community broadcasting.

Keywords: community broadcasting, community participation, community education, media pluralism

1. Introduction

Historically broadcasting in Nigeria dates back to 1932 when the empire service of the British Broadcast Corporation (BBC) was established. That re-diffusion service (RDS) was used by the colonial master as a tool of consolidating British rule over the colonies by designing it in such a way that it enhanced their economic and cultural processes. By April 1957, the Nigeria Broadcasting corporation was established as an independent institution designed to be neutral to existing political forces. "In practice, that dream was never realised, it was more of linguistics semantics as operated by the policy makers" (Kolo, 2009, p.2). Several decades after, governments (States and federal) have demonstrated how unwilling they are to the notion of independence in the broadcasting industry.

By 1992, the administration of General Ibrahim Babangida promulgated the National Broadcasting Commission Decree N0.38 that deregulated broadcasting. Before then, the federal regional and state governments exclusively owned, controlled and operated broadcasting in Nigeria (Media Rights Agenda (MRA) and Article 19, 2001, p.7). That decree which was amended by Decree 55 of 1999, empowered individuals and organizations outside government to participate in the ownership and operation of broadcasting.

The objective of the deregulation to harness those opportunities can hardly be said to be achieved or achievable by the NBC, given its present disposition. For instance, the NBC is majorly concerned with revenue generation through licence fees and other sundry avenues (Adeyileka 2012). The NBC is not alone in this backward drive; government policies and other institutional frameworks contribute to the retrogressive stance. The incessant interference in broadcasting operation by government; the "fill-my-pocket" posture of Nigeria politicians who pose as policy makers; the harsh economic standard; and multi-ethno-religious environment all affect the growth of broadcasting in Nigeria. In this vein, what exists in Nigeria at the moment is the top-to-bottom model of communication in relation to broadcasting. And that is why the policy makers pay deaf ears to the innovations of community media. For instance, Adeyileka (2012, p.1) submits that among all the African union members, Nigeria is that only country that is yet to start the implementation of community radio concept and the reason for this is not far-fetched. The National broadcasting commission (NBC), which is the regulatory body... has no guidelines for community radio, despite its avowed commitment, to that effect, thus making it impossible for the people at the grass roots to express themselves.

Although there are community based programmes within the existing broadcasting stations, there is no known typical station serving a typical community in the actual sense of it. This situation contradicts those of other sister African countries. For instance, Records show that community radios sprint up almost on daily basis in South Africa; such as TNG FM, JOZI FM and SOWETO TV. In Ghana, there are numerous community-based radio stations. The same thing goes for Liberia where there are no stringent conditions attached to television or radio licences. Thus, some radio stations like Radio VERITAS, Ducour FM, Star Radio, Kiss FM and others are owned by religious, charity, community

based organisations and private individuals including George Weah – the international footballer.

Inasmuch as other countries are embracing the community media initiative, Nigeria has lagged behind thereby making a bottom –to-top communication model to exist as a mere wish in Nigeria. This paper therefore presents the limitations as well as proffers remedial suggestions resulting from the study of a sample of media workers across the different regions of the country.

2. Literature

2.1. The Dominance of Alternative Media in Nigeria

Fifty two years after Nigeria's independence, the attitude of self-denigration has been the major cause of the embarrassingly sluggish development in the country. Nigeria has been reluctant in embracing technological, social, economic and other development models that engender growth and development in other nations. The successive government officials and policy makers always provide excuses, such as security concerns, as the reason for inactions (Egbuna, 2011). Reference has to be made to the fact that Nigeria refused to embrace Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) many years after the world has started using the technology. By 2000, analogue telephone was a status symbol in the country (though not all the lines were functional). According to Egbuna (2011), the official argument by the then Minister of Communications was that GSM was not a toy for every Tom, Dick and Harry and therefore a security risk for the people to have access to telephone. History has evidently proved them wrong because, since its introduction in 2001, mobile telephone has transformed the social and economic trends in Nigeria. Telecommunication has assumed the status of the fastest growing sector in Nigeria economy.

In 1999, a new democratic era was born; Nigeria started exhibiting the spirit of independence and steadfastness. The fear of the wrath of the military emperors was minimized. More private organizations obtained licences to run broadcast stations. That could explain the rise in the number of private stations in Nigeria. The high expectation by the public from policy makers, were diminished by government's ineptitude which makes it fear a liberalized broadcast system (Nwanze 2003). For instance, the Director General of the NBC, Yomi Bolarinwa recently said the issuance of community broadcast licence will begin April 2012 (Oguka 2012). But by the end of September, nothing was heard about the community broadcasting operation. .

Consequently, information flow is one way and does not sustain developmental efforts of different communities existing in the country. The only observable traces of community content exist in some programmes produced about community development and community initiatives; for example "Kam Kwuo" of BCA Radio, Abia State and Nzuko Ndi Igbo of NTA TV, Aba, Abia State. These community based programmes are produced by the broadcasters without input from the concerned communities. This still makes it impossible for the existence of bottom-to-top communication model. Therefore, people obviously depend on the alternative media for information concerning them but are not accorded the opportunity to make input towards active participation in the creation of media content. It is on this premise that community broadcasting is considered inevitable especially, now that other countries that embraced it have discovered the limitless benefits.

2.2. Community Broadcasting: A Tool for National Development in Nigeria

According to Buckley, (2008, p.1), "Community broadcasters are indeed artisans or craftspeople, creating images with sounds, not designing media to a formula driven by marketing calculation or propagandistic intent, but drawing on a passion for the medium and a belief that community broadcast can make a difference in people's lives and livelihoods." This statement was made by Steve Buckley as president of the World Association for Community Radio Broadcasting; for UNESCO for World Press Freedom Day in 2008. It emphasizes the fact that community broadcasting is a key agent of democratization for social, cultural and economic development (Oguka, 2012).

One of the strong arguments in support of the establishment of community broadcasting in Nigeria is its power not only to drive grassroots' development; but also its role for stimulating national cohesion and harmonious living in Nigeria (Garba 2011). The relevance of community broadcasting has been stressed by the ways development-motivated countries of the world embraced community radio broadcasting since 2005. Records show (Garba 2011) the population of community radio in different countries as at 2011 as follows: USA: 200; Australia: 116; India: 103; Canada: 95; Hungary: 60; UK: 200; Mali: 100; South Africa: 28; and Namibia: 26.

These figures, we are sure, have increased by now. The increase is sustained by the belief that community broadcasting instils confidence and self-expression among the people. Going by the meaning of community: a group of people living in a particular place for a common life coordinated by common interest (Smith, 2002); good broadcast stations, if well managed, will help to ease tension by preaching love, security consciousness, good neighbourliness, co-operation and peaceful co-existence. This is so because the voice of the community leaders is more authentic and trustworthy than the distant voice of government officials (Garba 2011).

When these ideals are inculcated in every small community in Nigeria, the sky will be the limit for national development and economic growth. The economic impact of community broadcasting has been variously outlined by scholars. In addition to its contributions to economic, democratic, social, cultural and agricultural growth of a nation, community radio helps to solve health problems by spreading awareness concerning it, disseminating information faster, eradicating ignorance and giving ordinary people the chance to air their views (Olakitan, 2010).

Although, different levels of government have expressed fear about the emergence of community broadcast stations, this participatory model contributes to successful governance because of its capacity to promote public enlightenment, education, mobilization and social reconstruction. Globally, community broadcasting has been recognised as an agent of development. It affords community the opportunity to harness the abundant resources it has for solving its own problems. All these are achievable because programming will be 100% local content. Among other benefits, community broadcasting addresses the need of the individuals also. It enriches their knowledge of issues while stimulation their creativity at the same time.

2.3. Factors that Limit Community Broadcasting in Nigeria

Despite the wave of community broadcasting around the world, Nigeria is yet to experience typical operation of community broadcasting. Although the National broadcasting Commission (NBC) – the regulatory body – claims that the campus radio stations are community radios, we entirely disagree with the regulator. The operation of those stations still reflect top-to-bottom communication model because, the stations are mostly education curricular-based. Several bottlenecks exist that deter community broadcasting in Nigeria. Below are the factors that limit community broadcasting in Nigeria.

2.3.1. Constitutional Limits

The 1999 constitution of Nigeria in section 39, titled Right to freedom of expression and the press provided (subsection 2) that: *... every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions; provided that no person other than government of the federation or of a state or any other person or body authorized by the president on the fulfilment of conditions laid down by an Act of the National assembly shall own, establish or operate a television or wireless broadcasting station for any purpose whatsoever.*

The above provision shows a rigorous approach which does not expedite the principles of participation. It therefore restricts the entire process because in the bid to victimize certain communities (that probably did not vote in elections) the government in power could deny licences. Also, the constitution withdraws the right of expression through proviso in section 39 (3) which states that: “Nothing in this section shall invalidate any other law that is reasonably justifiable in a democratic society.” The implication is that even licensed stations can be stripped of their licences by government at will; based on the reasons offered in subsection 3 (a and b).

It has to be said that the constitutional provisions do not reflect laws that are in consonance with democratic norms and principles. Also, statutory provisions for media practice in Nigeria hinge on this constitutional provision. This, therefore, is a monumental limit of community broadcasting initiative in the country. According to Olakitan (2010). It has to be stated here that the NBC is yet to license community stations because it is looking for a way of satisfying the conditions of government. Government on its part is reluctant to amend the provisions for NBC to swing into action because it (government) knows it may not be easy to interfere with community programming since the content will be communally generated. With the current trend, government has no other alternative than to smooth the provision so that Nigeria will join other nations in unlimited manners.

2.3.2. Regulatory Limits

The regulatory limits of community broadcasting are related to that of the constitution. The National Broadcasting commission (Deregulation) Decree 38 of 1992 (Nwanze, 2003) provides for the commission to exert regulatory powers on the broadcast ownership and operation in Nigeria. The decree set out in clear terms the responsibilities of the commission. The responsibilities as they relate to regulation are parts of the limits of community broadcasting.

Critics have observed that the provision, most times, negate the principles of deregulation. Therefore, it will be apt to say that the bulk of limits to community broadcasting lie with the regulation of the sector. Basically, section 2(b) of Decree 38 gave the NBC the power to receive, process and consider applications for licenses. Furthermore, section 9(1) of Decree 38 states that “A prospective applicant must have limited liability company, registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission in which Nigerians hold majority shares.” The above provision does not favour localised community broadcasting because the small interest groups wishing to engage in community media activities may not be able to go through the rigorous process. Again, the regulatory body has not come up with any concrete plans to encourage the establishment of community broadcasting stations. All that exist are policy statements that are not backed by actions.

Political Limits

The Decree 38 of 1992 did not give NBC the right to approve the grant of licences. The president reserves the sole right to approve licences. Also, the NBC is funded by the government making the body dependent on government. Therefore, the body operates as a political instrument used to influence broadcast activities in favour of the government in power.

It is obvious that the government knows the advantages of community broadcast; then, why has it not directed the NBC on licensing community radio and television? It is our opinion that the policy makers do not want general participation because they feel that their relevance in the society will diminish if common citizens participate in message creation and dissemination. Of course, government knows that such inactions have negative impacts on the overall development of the nation. But it is adamant because the government officials are engulfed in so many activities that they do not consider necessary for the general public to take note of. Based on that, they do not wish for a bottom-to-top communication model rather they depend on the alternative media which engage on downward projections. The scenario only allows communication to flow from the policy makers to the people; the interests and concerns of the people not always put into consideration. In this vein, only what they want the people to know are showcased by the media. They also know that there will be a change of attitude and perception when the participatory model is initiated through community broadcasting.

2.3.3. Financial Limits

In broadcasting, as in every other sector in Nigeria, finance is a problem that limits community broadcasting. Even though the NBC has not started issuance of community broadcasting licenses, license fee poses as a challenge to the operation. Learning from the impact of license fees and renewal fees on the existing private stations (their inability to make substantial profit after paying license fees ranging from 10 million to 25 Million naira); it becomes difficult for community stations to be commercially viable in the face of the present licensing regime. In relation to this, in order to maximise profits, since the duration of the licence (five years) is not enough to recoup investment, the tendency of over commercialization endangers the essence of community broadcasting. Propoola (2004) cited in Okunna (2005, p.89) states that "broadcast media in Nigeria are shying away from their primary responsibilities of educating, informing and enlightening the citizenry...and violets the fundamental rights of the people...to receive the right type of information". However, the transition to digital broadcasting poses another form of challenge to community broadcasting considering availability and availability which hinge on financial strength of the different communities. Therefore the economic imperatives that drive the development of new distribution platforms pose as limits to community broadcasting in Nigerian.

2.4. Connotations of the Limits for South-North Conversations

There is rise in the clamour for community media forms and this could be attributed to the need for people to feel connected to their local communities. According to Howley (2005, p.30), "locally oriented, participatory media organizations are at once a response to the encroachment of the global upon the local as well as an assertion of the local cultural identities and socio-political autonomy in the light of the global forces." The main issue in the South-North conversations is the enhancement of bottom-to-top communication model as against the top-to-bottom model which does not adequately consider the representation of public interest.

Consequently, there is well-established dissatisfaction with mainstream media form and content; and that has contributed to the growth of community media and increasing attention given to them (Meadows et al, 2007). The media represent culture, therefore, participation by different communities enables members of a community to live communally. When such an atmosphere is created, the citizens are able to talk for themselves so that those at the helm of affairs hear them out and consider their interests during policy formulation and execution. Considering these positions, the discussed limits of community broadcasting in Nigeria render different connotations for Nigeria and its people in relation to the South-North Conversations. Namely;

1. It will be difficult in the face of the limitations to reverse the top-to-bottom communication model in Nigeria.
2. Communities will find it difficult to invest in the area of community broadcasting because the environment has several restrictions.
3. Communication flow will continue to be downward and one way.
4. The citizens will lack the avenues to contribute to both local and national issues for political, economic and cultural developments.
5. Above all, the country will continue to be excluded, developmentally and otherwise, from the positions of scholars and stakeholders who are in support of South-North conversation through the creation of balance in form of two way communication model.

It is in view of the above connotations that Adeyileka (2012) recommends the licensing of community broadcasting outfits in Nigeria to provide a forum for local expression and improvement of people's access to information in local languages, as Star FM is doing in Liberia.

2.5. Theoretical Framework

This study was conducted under the framework of theories of change because community media create the atmosphere for audience participation in relation to issues of rural and national development. For instance, the content theory explains why people are motivated. According to Acknowledge and Aspen (2003), the theory of change encourages a participatory process. This is because it is better for the right people to participate in developmental issues policy formulation. Thus, for rural and national development, community media enables the people to participate in the content of programmes as it affects their daily lives (Acknowledge and Aspen 2003). Corroborating Acknowledge and Aspen's principles, McMillan and Chavis (1986, p.7) submit that "social bonding factor contained items concerning the ability to identify neighbours, feeling part of the neighbourhood... a major role in determining attachment." As a result, community radio and television create the bond between programme producers and the recipients. Going by the community based theory of change, audience participation will lead to community participation because the daily discourse will become communal. Subsequently, the communal approach will enhance community organization, community education and community development.

3. Methodology

The survey research design was employed to conduct this study using the questionnaire as instrument for generating data. The method provided the opinions of broadcasters to be taken as their views about the issues relating to community broadcasting in Nigeria. Further, a qualitative approach was adopted where focus group discussion was embarked on. As such geographical and interest groups were engaged in the discussions. A combination of the cluster, purposive and random sampling techniques was used to select the participants in the study spread across the different locations of South East Nigeria. Both the qualitative and quantitative data were statistically and thematically analysed to answer the research questions. The sample size was arrived at by substituting the Yaro Yemeni's formula: $n = (Z^2)(pq)/e^2$; Where, n = sample size; P = percentage of response; q = Percentage of non response e = Margin of error; z = Level of significance. = $(1.96)^2 (90 \times 10) / (0.05)^2 = 138$

4.0. Results

Out of the 138 copies of questionnaire administered, 132 (96%) were found useful for analysis. The respondents were asked to indicate the factors that limit the development of appropriate channels for community broadcasting in Nigeria. Among the participants, 44 or 33% said policy makers delay community broadcasting efforts; while 26 or 20% said government, lack faith in the people to participate in message creation. Another 24 (18%) said corruption in the government quarters is responsible for the non-development of community broadcasting; while 22 (17%) blamed it on legal restraints. The remaining 16 participants (12%) said Nigeria communities are not well defined and thus, it is not possible for them to pursue any agenda. Out of the entire respondents, a majority of 90 or 68% rated the government's efforts to establish community broadcasting stations low while another 26 (20%) rated government overage. Only a few of the respondents (16 or 12%) rated government's efforts high. The respondents also rated the efforts of private sector/NGO efforts to encourage community broadcasting in Nigeria. The data show that 78 or 59% rated them high while 30 (23%) rated them to have average performance. The remaining 24 or 18% rated them low.

The respondents were further asked to outline how government actions and inactions against the development of community broadcasting has affected bottom-to-top communication model. To the question, a cumulative of 46 respondents or 35% said the actions/inactions resulted to non-participation in the political process by the citizenry; while 32 or 24% said the scenario created lack of national consciousness among the people. Another 28 or 21% said the environment create slow pace of community development; while 26 (20%) said the situation made one-way communication to persist in the country. Lastly, the respondents were asked to identify the factors that would create conducive atmosphere for community broadcasting in Nigeria. Among the respondents, a cumulative of 42 or 32% said government finding would sustain community stations; while 30 or 23% said low licence fees will enable successful community broadcasting. Another 26 or 20% said that the regulation of broadcasting should be development oriented; while 24 (18%) called for independence of the regulatory body, NBC. The remaining 10 or 7% called for adequate organisation of the according to interest groups.

5.0. Discussion

5.1. Research Question One: *To what extent has Nigerian government limited the development of appropriate channels for community broadcasting?*

The data show that unnecessary delay by policy makers accounted for the major limitation of community broadcasting in Nigeria. Other Limitations include: Legal constraints, Lack of faith in the people by government, undefined communities, and corruption in the official quarters. These findings negate the principles of community broadcasting. Successive governments have made policies to favour those in government; and this could be referred to the long years of military rule during which the regimes made laws to favour themselves as against the wishes of the people. The contributions of the masses to national development did not matter to them. Consequently, the civilians tow the lines of the military juntas and the circumstances begot corruption. The findings are supported by the submissions of focus group participants:

Participant 1: *You see, the government is not focused. There isn't anything to show that it supports community broadcasting agenda talk less of having a plan.*

Participant 2: *Policy making in Nigeria is always a jamboree. Just as in every other sector, they only make pronouncements that are not backed by actions.*

Participant 3: *Again, the excuses they give are baseless. How would they suggest that community stations would undermine security. So they're trying to say that Boko Haram, kidnapping and militancy are caused by community stations. They should realise that community stations will help curb some of these problems.* [Focus group participants at a radio station in Enugu, Nigeria]

It has to be stated that the findings cuter the projections of change theory because Nigeria's government looks adamant towards what the entire world has embraced. These findings have negative implications for the South-North conversations. This submission is made in respect of Nigeria remaining stagnant in the area of participatory communication and therefore, the benefits of community broadcasting as outlined by the theory of change including community organization, community education and community development. This could be the reason behind the undefined nature of communities as found by the study because the people are not motivated by change initiators like legal frameworks. Similarly, the data show a conflicting trend in relation to efforts to encourage community broadcasting in Nigeria. Figure 1 shows that the private sector/NGO's performance is high and this could be attributed to the numerous actions of interest groups, NGOs and informal organization in the clamour for community broadcasting in the country. A typical example of such group is the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition o (NCRC) among others. However, the curve show downward rating of government efforts which could be attributed to the overall non performance or non-compliant policy initiatives, pronouncements and overt non-response to the yearnings of the people for community broadcasting.

5.2. Research Question Two: *How have government actions/inactions affected bottom-to-top communication model?*

The finding shows that the actions/inactions of government have affected the bottom-to-top communication model in several ways. They are as outlined below. Slow pace of Community development, Non-participation in the political process, Inadequate national consciousness, and Persistent one way communication. The findings establish that the postulations of content theory as a theory of change are not operational in Nigeria. For instance, it was established that community broadcasting fosters community development and encourages general participation. In essence, participation will enable national consciousness but we found out that these are not in existence probably because the people do not believe in the different levels of governments again. Therefore, if communication remains one-way as we found, Nigeria may witness high degree apathy to the political and other processes.

5.3. Research Question Three: *What are the requirements for successful community broadcasting in Nigeria?*

The factors that enable successful community broadcasting in Nigeria as found by this study are: Development oriented regulation, Government finding of community stations, Low licence fees, Independence of NBC and Organization of community forums. These findings are suggestive and they capture the factors that will enhance healthy community broadcasting in the country. First, if government officials and policy makers renege from enacting self-satisfying regulations, the benefits of community broadcasting including development will be explored. Secondly, considering the economic hardship faced by the majority of Nigerian citizens, government's funding of community stations will go a long way in helping the formation and organization of community forums; which will create the opportunity for participation. Again the high registration and licence fees are responsible for the call for a reduction by the people while these will not be achieved without the independence of the regulatory body, NBC. Similarly, a focus group discussion led to the following submissions:

Participant 1: *In fact, even if they start granting licences for community stations, I don't think the citizens will partake. They will still hijack the process because the citizens are poor. Hardship does not allow people come together and it will definitely affect their approach towards community broadcasting outfits.*

Participant 2: *I think something should be done to enable equal participation. If the politicians take over community broadcasting, they will determine the content and we'll still be where we are.* [Focus Group participants at a television station in Umuahia, Abia State].

The above submissions suggest that the present environment does not favour community broadcasting in Nigeria. Therefore, the conditions as found by this study will remedy the limitations of community broadcasting.

6.0 Conclusion

In Nigeria, government monopolised broadcasting until 1992. With the deregulation decree of that year, it was thought that enabling grounds would be created for the sector. It was not to be so because governments saw broadcasting as avenues to legitimize there administration by allowing few private participation. The permutation was wrong because elsewhere, liberal approaches are being adopted for the growth of the sector which in turn engenders healthy growth of the nation. Community broadcasting hovers around the theories of charge which maintains community participation, community education and community development. Although there are community based programmes in the existing

broadcasting stations in Nigeria, there are no community broadcasting stations in the real scene of it. A lot of factors impinge on the establishment of community stations in the country ranging from undefined communities to legal constraints. But while the civil society has been rated high in performance efforts to encourage community broadcasting, government was rated low. This necessitates drastic actions cum conditions to make Nigeria be among other countries that embraced community media. The benefits of community media are numerous that the government should step down some of the regulatory and other measures for successful and fruitful community broadcasting in Nigeria. The status quo as it is in Nigeria does not favour the bottom-to-top communication model as a major paradigm in the South-North conversations.

7.0 Recommendations

Having found that community broadcasting is beneficial for both community and national developments; and that Nigeria has no typical example of community broadcasting outfits, we make the following recommendations:

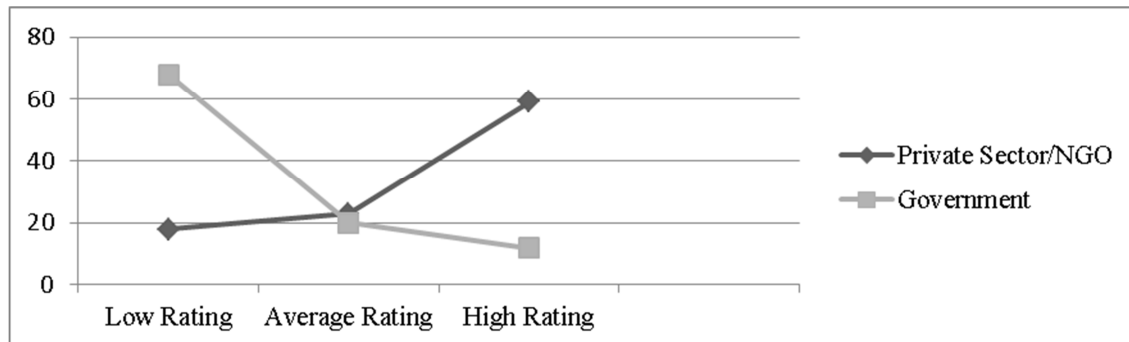
- (1) Nigerian government should establish a committee to ascertain the approaches to community broadcasting in nations where the practices are successful.
- (2) The regulatory body should make frantic efforts to start licensing community radio and television stations.
- (3) There should be a new regime of regulation in relation the licence fees and other charges. This will in turn create opportunity for different categories of communities to partake in the process.
- (4) The citizenry should be sensitized about community broadcasting so that they internalize their responsibilities in relation to content creation and contribution to national development.

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Figure 1: The trends of efforts to encourage community broadcasting in Nigeria.



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