Community Radio and Nigeria's National Security Exigencies: Fears and Promises

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Abstract
The community radio project is an emerging form of broadcasting that is gaining popularity and acceptability more than the other forms of broadcasting (state, public, commercial, private, and institutional). Its popularity is largely due to its potential to democratize and provide a horizontal form of communication, thus, contributing more meaningfully to development efforts than the other forms of broadcasting. Nigeria's national security at the moment is facing serious challenges to the point that the country's corporate existence as a united entity is threatened. This calls for serious measures to address the challenges. Community radio offers a veritable communication channel to facilitate peace building mechanisms and national integration. This paper argues that community radio project in Nigeria, when established, would have daunting challenges as well as promises in managing security issues. The daunting challenges centre on the activities of the ruling class and elites who would want to manipulate the project for their selfish motives. The promises are in the democratic, people-driven, and development-based features of community broadcasting. To ensure that community radio project facilitates national security, the paper recommends, among other things, political will, involvement of the people, media literacy education, and the involvement of civil societies to assist curtail cases of excesses in the operation of the community radio project
Key words: Community radio, national security, fears, promises, Nigeria.

1. Introduction

Radio broadcasting around the world in contemporary times (especially in developing nations) is tilting towards community broadcasting (Alumuku, 2006). Reasons advanced for this trend rest in the democratization nature of community broadcasting, which has given rise to a horizontal type of communication. Other forms of radio broadcasting like public service broadcasting, commercial broadcasting, private broadcasting, and institutional broadcasting, etc have failed or done very little to promote democratization of communication and ensure horizontal type of communication in Africa (Opubor, 2000; Alumuku, 2006; Ayedun-Aluma & Olatubosun; 2011, Kur, 2011). Hence, these forms of broadcasting have been found inadequate in facilitating the desired development. They are, in the words of Pate (2012, p.12), "elitist, overbearingly controlled and technically and financially incapable to sufficiently meet or even reflect the socioeconomic needs of locally diverse communities in the North." Even though Pate makes reference to Northern Nigeria, the situation is same across the length and breadth of Nigeria and many other developing countries.

Many African countries have embraced the idea of community radio. In West Africa, only Nigeria is yet to commence community radio project. As at 2006, even the less endowed countries in the sub-region showed great progress in the number of community radio stations established: Niger had 98 stations; Mali, 88; Ghana, 15; Senegal, 14; and Burkina Faso, 33, among others (Pate, 2012). If assurance by Nigeria's National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) is anything to go by, Nigeria will soon commence community broadcasting. The Director-General of the Commission, Yomi Bolarinwa, told the country's House of Representatives Committee on Information on January 24, 2012 that, "President Goodluck Jonathan is expected to approve the request for the establishment of unstructured community broadcast stations by the second quarter of 2012 " (Badal, 2012, p.11). The second quarter of 2012 has come and gone, the project has not commenced. But the government is still promising the project will soon take off.

Nigeria is today facing national security challenges never imagined before. The internal security is almost broken down. Activities of Boko Haram, militants, and kidnappers, coupled with the rising level of public frustration arising from incompetent leadership at all levels, poverty, structural weaknesses of public institutions, massive stealing of public resources, etc (Pate, 2011) have put Nigeria in a quagmire situation. Capitalizing on these anomalies, are appeals to ethnic, religious, regional and sectional sentiments by selfish individuals and groups who benefit from conflicts and crises. All these threaten Nigeria's national security. Probably, these

factors and more must have prompted the United States of America to foresee a likely breakup of Nigeria by 2015.

Community radio, no doubt, has a number of objectives that if well implemented would contribute significantly to douse tension and restore confidence in national security. There are also fears that if not carefully managed and operated, community radio could exacerbate the existing security challenges that threaten national security. The onerous task of this paper is to examine those fears and promises of community radio in Nigeria's national security. The rationale is to share thoughts and stimulate ideas that could assist Nigeria establish and sustain a community radio project that would contribute in addressing security and other developmental challenges.

2. Overview of Community Radio

The idea of community radio is predicted on the notion of participatory communication for the facilitation of community development. The target of community radio is a specific community in terms of ownership, control, operation, and listenership. The term "community" in communication discourse is understood within spatial and social contexts (Alumuku, 2006; Ayedum-Aluma & Olatubosun, 2011). In the spatial context, community is understood in terms of geographical territory or a particular cultural or political entity. In the social context, community is defined in terms of shared interests, tastes, and values as well as demographic and psychographic factors. The members of a community from the social context may not necessarily reside in the same geographical area. The community for community radio is defined along these two contexts. Thus, according to Ayedum-Aluma and Olatubosun (2011, p.188), the community of community radio "may refer to a group having a common language, a common history, a common lifestyle, as well as a common residence or locality." This also means that the community is not just a local entity, but could also be a global entity, reinforced by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). On the basis of the foregoing, Ayedum-Aluma and Olatubosun (2011, p.188) define community radio as "an activity owned and managed by a group whose common and defining property may be geographical, demographic, religious, political or even historical." While this definition may be perfect in other countries, it is not in Nigeria considering the ethnic, religious and political tensions that usually arise to threaten peace and security. Hence, a definition that is silent on those tension areas is a better one for Nigeria. This paper thus views community radio as a broadcast organization established, owned , and operated by a community (which could be spatial or social) on a non-profit basis to provide participatory and horizontal communication as a catalyst for the overall development of the community. The characteristics of community radio include access and participation, volunteerism, independence, localism, and diversity. These characteristics are necessary for the achievement of the goals of the radio, which centre around facilitating human development anchored on freedom, which in contemporary societies is viewed as a springboard for sustainable development.

3. State of Nigeria's National Security

World Bank Report of February, 2007 classified Nigeria among the 50 fragile states in the World (Orji, 2011). Six years after, the situation appears same if not worse. Inability to guarantee national security is one among the basic features of state fragility. Nigeria's national security has always been under threat, but the one in the present Fourth Republic, apart from the civil war (1967-1970), has taken the most severe dimension. Ethnic militias are all over the country causing havoc. The Niger Delta crises, for now, appear resolved because the president of the country is from the area. As soon as he leaves office, the crises will likely resurface. This is because, not minding the amnesty and government's efforts to improve living conditions in the area, most of the problems which gave rise to the crises are yet to be addressed. These problems border on bad governance, social injustice, environmental damage, militarization, lack of social and economic development, lack of self-worth, and lack of participation in the oil industry by the people of the region (Wilson, 2009). Of recent, the Boko Haram insurgence is making many to think the breakaway of Nigeria is in a matter of months. The current "fire-to-fire" approach by the government in managing the Boko Haram insurgence is not yielding the expected result, since the violent activities of the group have continued on a daily basis (Abo, 2011). Kidnapping is on the increase and communal crises have become endemic. In addition, threats to the democratic process in the country pose serious challenges to national security. These threats are in the form of electoral malpractices, insensitive and desperate conduct of politicians, personalization of state power, massive stealing of public funds, absence of accountability, executive fiat, tyrannical attitudes, bad governance (Kukah, 2007; 2011; Adedayo, 2011), structural weakness of public institutions, disregard for rule of law, increased deprivations, debilitating poverty, rising public frustration, and violation of human rights (Akinwale, 2010; Bayo, 2011) among others.

4. Community Radio and Likely Threat to National Security

When established, the community radio project is likely to face a number of challenges that may prevail against national security. One of these challenges is the likely undue interest of the elite group in community radio. The

fear is that the elite class will have an undue interest in the operations of community radio. This is so especially when the stations become so influential, for example, in electoral victory. Just as we see politicians spend huge sums of money and do everything possible to achieve electoral victory, so too the same politicians would do everything humanly and sometimes superhumanly possible to control and manipulate community radio stations to their advantage. As long as politicians in Nigeria continue to manipulate critical institutions like the media, the country will know no peace.

Cut-throat rivalry within and among communities could be another challenge of community radio that may work against national security**.** A sad observation about the nature of relationship within and among communities in Nigeria is the tendency to more often than not engage in cut-throat rivalry. This, sometimes, is as a result of manipulation of diversity issues or appeal to sectional interest by the elite class to achieve their selfish goals (Usman, 1987). Sometimes, national issues that unite all Nigerians are manipulated and interpreted to mean ethnic, religious or sectional conflict or rivalry. For example, the Boko Haram insurgence has been given religious and regional coloration. To many, Boko Haram is an Islamic and Northern Nigeria war against the Christians in Southern Nigeria. This view is held in disregard to the fact that Muslims and Christians, Northerners and Southerners are victims of Boko Haram attacks, as long as they are in Northern Nigeria where Boko Haram operates. Such sentiments could easily be reflected in community radio stations, and this could threaten national security.

Another challenge is funding. The question of who funds community radio in Nigeria for sustainable operations remains a nagging one. If community radio must remain independent and be actually owned and controlled by members of a community, it should be funded by the same members of the community or other neutral sources without any undue interest (Opubor, 2000). With members of a community funding, it is expected that no member or a group in that community should contribute to the funding too much more than other members and groups in the same community. This is to prevent certain individuals and groups assuming overwhelming control of a station at the expense of the other members of the community. In this situation, the problematic question is: Would the token contribution made by members of a community be enough to sustain operation of the station? In Kenya, funding is a major problem of community radio. For this, many of the stations don't produce serious programmes that would educate and inform the people; instead, they play music most of the time, and are on air for a few hours in a day (Olang, 2011). In a bid to be well funded, community radio stations should not go to sources that give them good money, but in return exercise undue influence and control. "He who pays the piper calls the tune," so the saying goes. Any form of undue influence on a community radio station by certain individuals and groups is bound to produce tension, physically or psychologically, which could lead to crisis.

The issue of volunteerism may also pose a challenge. Community radio, as stated above, makes use of volunteers. In Nigeria, as noted by Kur (2010), most volunteers for work in community radio stations are likely to come from the huge mass of unemployed tertiary school leavers, who may be looking for something little (honorarium) to keep life moving pending when they get a better paid job. This kind of volunteers is likely to be vulnerable to the point of being used by members of the elite class for selfish ends. Politicians in particular like using the mass media to insult, cajole and intimidate their opponents and rivals. This kind of volunteers in community radio stations would likely be ready hands to be used by the politicians to do this.

Closely related to the challenge of volunteerism, are the problems of ethical violations and unprofessional tendencies associated with the existing forms of broadcasting in Nigeria (government, public, private, commercial). There is no guarantee that ethical standards and professionalism will be upheld in the operation of community radio in Nigeria. Institutions that should promote and enforce media ethics and professionalism like the regulatory agencies, professional bodies, and educational institutions are not doing enough to stem the tide (Mfumbusa, 2008; Nwabueze, 2010). Unethical and unprofessional operation of the stations has the potential to instigate different segments of a community or the country at large and create tension. This is not good enough for the attainment of national security.

In setting up a community radio station, a number of steps are taken. One of the steps is the establishment of management and programmes committees (Ilboudo, 2000). Drawing from the experience of community radio project in Mali, Alumuku (2006) suggests that 10 representatives of different social and professional backgrounds should constitute each of the two committees. It is these committee members that work to establish and run the station on behalf of the entire members of a community. These committee members function more or less like Board of Directors in a government or privately-owned radio station. The issue of concern here is representation. How well would the persons appointed onto the committees represent the various interest groups in the community? In Nigeria, representatives, in many cases, do not represent the people; rather they represent themselves, their pockets and their family members, friends and political acquaintances. This is the case with most parliament members at the federal, state and local levels. The same thing applies to people appointed into boards of government agencies and parastatals. Many of them see their membership onto such boards as a money-making opportunity. Those that make the appointments see the appointments as reward to the appointees.

These attitudes, it is feared, could be the case with community radio.

5. Community Radio and the Facilitation of National Security

Any meaningful discussion of the role of community radio in facilitating Nigeria's national security must take into cognizance the goals of community broadcasting. These goals are summarized by Kur (2010, p.313) in the words: "to stimulate members of a community to galvanize their potentials for sustainable development of the community and the nation at large." Thus, community radio is seen in this light as a veritable tool in ensuring early warning and monitoring signal, mediation, facilitating and perfecting alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, and contributing significantly to societal orientation on issues of diversity that are often the cause of conflicts, when poorly managed. This could be achieved through the education role of community radio. The education role of community radio is more effective than that of the government and privately-owned radio stations because of the people-friendly features of community radio. These features, as advanced by Kur (2011), show that community radio has a wider reach within a community, transcend boundary of language and illiteracy, is pervasive and very popular, is rural-friendly and held with high credibility because of its non-partisanship and objectivity. Similarly, a community radio station is truly traditional; the content is not commercial, the messages from it have local flavor, and utilize appropriate indigenous materials and resources. All these features make community radio a credible and persuasive medium.

Lack of effective peace education is one missing link in the achievement of peace and security in Nigeria (Alimba, 2010). Peace education is "the deliberate attempt to educate children and adults in the dynamics of conflict and the promotion of peacemaking skills in homes, at schools, and in communities throughout the world, using all the channels and instruments of socialization" (Gumut, 2006, p.165). Peace education has a strong tendency to change the physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual attitude of people within cultural, political and social context for a relationship of people and harmony (Alimba, 2010). It is the conviction of many peace scholars that peace education is a pathway to national security. Community radio, as a credible socializing agent, could contribute meaningfully in peace education. It could promote local identity, character and culture (which in the African point of view rests in peacemaking), create diversity of voices and opinions (which when galvanized produce peaceful relationships), encourage open dialogue and the democratic process, and promote civil society, good governance and professional responsibility (Alumuku, 2006). All these roles could contribute immensely to bring about an effective education that could promote peace and shun all tendencies of violence and disunity.

Food security is necessary for the attainment of national security (Karim & Adekunle, 2010). Food security, according to Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 2003), is the ready and availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (that is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, strategies, stealing or other coupling strategies). Absence of food security is a cause of conflict. This is true considering the notion that deprivation of any form (including that of food) could lead to expression of hostility (Karim & Adekunle, 2010). As at 2004, Obasanjo (2004) reported that 70 percent of Nigeria's active labor force is yet to achieve food security. The situation by 2012 is probably worse since the poverty level in Nigeria is on the increase. Community radio could raise awareness and advocate strongly for the achievement of food security. Since it is likely that many of the community radio stations would be rural-based, agricultural and rural occupational programming will be their priority target. In such programming, it is expected that education on how to achieve high agricultural productivity will be strongly emphasized. This is in addition to promoting literacy, health and development, as well as encouraging learning and skills-building. All these will go a long way to empower the people not to sit back and wait for the government, but make conscious individual and communal efforts to have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs for an active and healthy life.

Democracy is said to be an effective conflict management strategy (Ezirim, 2010). Full participation of citizens in the affairs that concern them engenders peace and contributes to conflict management. Sisk (2003) notes that democracy is an effective conflict management strategy because its principles, institutions, and rules seek to manage inevitable social conflicts in deeply divided and less conflicted societies. A number of social conflicts threatening the corporate existence of Nigeria arise as a result of the failure of democracy (Danjibo, 2010). If democracy in Nigeria is able to guarantee basic democratic principles, sustainable peace and security too will be guaranteed. The principles include: the right to participate in decision-making, respect for the rule of law, and security of life and property. Others are the right to vote and be voted for, freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of the press, freedom to live freely anywhere, and good governance and service delivery. One of the fundamental objectives of community radio is to facilitate the process of democracy by creating diversity of voices and opinions, encouraging open dialogue and the democratic process, encouraging participation of all individuals, social and cultural groups in community affairs; promoting good governance; providing diversity in broadcast ownership; demystifying mass media for participation; providing missing

communication services; and promoting civil society (Alumuku, 2006). All these beautiful objectives of community radio, if properly executed, could contribute meaningful in establishing a viable democracy in Nigeria.

6. Way Forward: A Conclusion

The argument in this paper is that Nigeria's national security is under threat. The existing forms of broadcast media (government, public, private and commercial stations) have done little or nothing to address the security threat; rather some of them have contributed in exacerbating the security challenges. The introduction of community radio in some countries of the world has guaranteed development initiative in many areas including the attainment of appreciable level of peace and security. Nigeria, hopefully, will soon commence the community radio project. Considering the socio-economic and political atmosphere in Nigeria at the moment, the beautiful objectives of a community radio project, which among other things include promoting national security, may be thwarted. This is the case if the community radio project is not properly and carefully managed. How then should a community radio project be handled in Nigeria for any meaningful role in development, including facilitating national security? The following are points to consider:

- The first step in establishing the community radio project is awareness and advocacy. In Nigeria, the awareness has been very low. Not many citizens know what community radio is all about. It is not late to raise this awareness. At the moment, the pressure group raising this awareness is an elite group targeting same elite groups (Ayedun-Aluma & Olatubosun, 2011). It is necessary to bring in all stakeholders into the pressure group. These stakeholders among others include: market women, farmers, rural residents, religious organizations, different community associations, security agencies, educational institutions at all levels (primary, secondary and tertiary), professional associations, and regulatory agencies among others. The suggestion here is that even when government commences the issuance of licenses for community radio broadcasting, communities should not be in a haste to obtain the licenses. Adequate and effective awareness about the objectives and operations of community radio should be raised, and the entire community must agree to own a station before obtaining a license and going ahead to commence broadcasting. It should not be imposed on a community.

- Closely related to awareness creation and advocacy is the urgent need for media literacy education. This education is about an individual's understanding of the place of the media in society as well as the place of the specifics of media production and consumption and how the process affects the final product (Ende & Udende, 2011). When members of a community are adequately and correctly knowledgeable on issues concerning the mass media (community radio in particular), they would be in a better position to insist that the media discharge their objectives faithfully. Similarly, with media literacy, the audience would not be short-changed by the ideologically-inclined mass media messages, as aptly noted by Krucsay (2008, p.195): "media are never neutral vessels of information. The images, which we think are depictions of reality, are actually shaped, professionally constructed and this is why their decoding requires high potential of media competence."

- Funding community radio stations for sustainability cannot be done solely by the hosting or owning community, which may lack adequate resources, in the case of Nigeria. International donors and NGOs should come in to support. Where absolutely necessary, government could be involved to support community radio stations through equipment and training. Where it supports through direct funding, it has to be a deliberate policy approved by the legislature. In any case, funding of community radio must be seen and treated as a social good. This thinking is necessary to guarantee independence of the stations.

- Civil societies will have to come in to assist in realizing a successful community radio project in Nigeria. Organized civil societies are characterized by their resolve to act as checks against the excesses of government, human rights violation, abuse of rule of law, and monitoring of the application of constitutional provisions. They also contribute to increase the participation and skills of all various segments of society and instill a sense of hard work and moral virtues in citizens (Kukah, 2007). With these characteristics, civil societies are in a position to assist the community radio project to work in Nigeria.

- Training of staff of community radio stations is necessary for a successful community radio project in Nigeria. The staff members of community radio stations are mostly volunteers with no formal training in journalism and mass communication. They need to undergo special convenient training to be able to work effectively in a community radio station. The training should include the use of radio in conflict management and peace building. Where the staff received formal training before being employed, they still need to update their training since training in radio broadcasting is dynamic and on-going.

- The effectiveness of community radio in facilitating national security and other developmental goals rests also on continuous research on the feelings about the performance of the radio, and on the effects of the radio on the community. The results of the research would assist the radio inject initiatives for creditable

performance on a constant basis.

- Political will of the government and major stakeholders in community radio project is necessary for a meaningful impact on the Nigerian society. It is the political will that prompts a policy that favors community radio project. Such a policy introduces regulatory measures that ensure unhindered access to the radio and guarantee freedom of the press. Such a policy does not encourage high licensing fees so as to encourage many communities to establish their own community radio stations. Such a policy encourages independence of the stations and other practices that assist in the realization of the goals of a community radio project.

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