Community Radio: An Entertainment Factory or Catalyst for Development, Food and Nutrition Security?

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ABSTRACT

Several studies have confirmed that Community Radio can go a long way in promoting agriculture by educating farmers about new farming methods; issuing early warning whenever there are outbreaks of pests and diseases; monitoring weather patterns and informing farmers on appropriate planting dates. Further research argues that communication of science and technology best occurs outside the school through real world experiences with the media as an important forum at which such experiences are shared. Most rural folk rely on CR as a source of news and entertainment. However, CR is much more than an entertainment factory; it is potentially an invaluable forum for rural farmers and agricultural researchers to engage in scientific dialogue, which is aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SGD) number 2. This paper, therefore, investigates the extent to which efforts have been made to unlock CR's potential in working towards attaining the national goal of ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture. The paper will rely on survey data drawn from a recent study on the link between Community Radio and Food Security. The outcome is expected to inform policy on the need to enhance integration of CR in disseminating agricultural information to rural farmers in Kenya as the country marches towards the successful implementation of its national development goal of making Kenya a Food Secure nation.

 Keywords: Community Radio, Development, Food and Nutrition Security

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1.0 Introduction

Kenya's Vision 2030 is the country's development programme from 2008 to 2030 (Vision, K. 2007). It was launched on 10th June 2008 by President Mwai Kibaki, with the main objective being to help transform Kenya into a "newly industrializing, middle-income country" providing a high quality life to all its citizens by 2030. However, ten years after the grand launch, Kenya continues to feature prominently on the Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) list of underdeveloped nations that fully depend on donor aid. The ODA report accurately mirrors the current GDP of 70.5 billion US Dollars in 2016 (World Bank, 2017), life expectancy of 62.3 years, a poverty index of 42% in 2016, a bloated civil service, a worrying national debt burden, perennial hunger and increasing national malnutrition levels, which currently stands at 20.5%. To date, progress towards achievement of national vision 2030 goal is mired in paradox reflected by wide socio-economic disparities across the nation. For example, wealth distribution, provision of essential services and access to social amenities are skewed in favour of urban dwellers. Thus, Kenya is listed among the most unequal nations on the planet. It is estimated that 73.9 percent of Kenyans are rural dwellers, a population characterized by poverty, low literacy levels and little knowledge of agricultural technologies. The rest (26.1 percent), live way above the poverty line and have access to quality education and social services. Many consider these economic indicators a big setback to implementation of Kenya's vision 2030. Findings by previous researchers such as; (Vision, K. 2007, Ochichi, 2014, Patil, 2015, and World Bank, 2017) all agree that agriculture, the second largest contributor to Kenya's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), is the best bet for a rapid attainment of Kenya's Vision 2030 as well as SDG No. 2. However, the impacts of climate change, high cost of farm input and low levels of technological adoption have remained a big hindrance to successful implementation of sustainable agricultural practices, especially in rural areas. Findings of this study indicate that Community Radio could offer a lasting solution to the challenge of rural development, especially food and nutrition security, which as previously stated, is considered the key plank to attainment of Kenya's Vision 2030 goal.

1.1 Objective of the study:

To obtain information about local knowledge and opinion about the role of Community Radio in the attainment of national development goals of Kenya.

1.2 Theoretical underpinning

The study was underpinned by the Media Effects theory, De Fleur and Ball-Rokeach (1988), Jeffres (1997), Katz (2001b), Perse (2001). Media effect or influence refers to the actual force exerted by a media (radio, newspaper, television etc) message on an individual or audience thought, attitudes and/or behavior. The message could be an appeal for peace during post-election violence, a radio programme on how to grow quality poultry or a TV programme on how to offer home-based care for Hiv/Aids patients.

2.0 Literature review

A national seminar on community broadcasting held in Nairobi between 25th -26th June 2008, described community broadcasting as follows "Community Broadcasting service is controlled by non-profit entity and offer non-profit service to a particular community. Normally, community broadcasting offers distinct broadcasting service dealing with specific community issues (development, health, peace e.t.c.)". The World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC), 1988, cited in Fraser, and Estrada, (2001) , asserts that; "community radio responds to the needs of the community it serves, contributing to its development within progressive perspectives in favour of social change, community radio strives to democratize communication through community participation in different forms in accordance with each specific social context". Apparently, this view about community broadcasting appear to be echoed by Lush (2011), who describes community radio thus; "community radio is a type of radio service that caters for the interest of a certain area, broadcasting content that is popular to a local audience but which may often be overlooked by commercial or mass-media broadcasters" Khan goes on to say that the term has somewhat different meanings in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia.

It appears difficult to comprehensively define the term "community radio" without making an attempt to explain what "community" is. To begin with, it would help to understand that communities are complex entities, and what constitutes "community" in the context of community radio is usually a debatable issue that varies from country to country. Sociologists define "community" as a group of interacting people living in a common location. The researchers believes that our understanding or interpretation of a "location" could also vary to mean a township, a county, a group of villages and so forth. The reality is that community radio is often built around concepts of access, inclusion and participation and therefore the term community may be thought of, as often referring to the geographical communities based around the possible reach of the radio's signal. That is to say, individuals who can receive radio broadcast content and their potential to participate in the creation of such broadcast content. These insights are a pointer to the fact that a Community Radio facility should belong to the community that not only listens to its programmes, but also participates in creating the same. Secondly, the radio should be responsive to the needs, aspirations and thoughts of the host community.

Examples of broadcasting services registered as community radios in Kenya include the following: Mang'elete FM in Makueni, Radio Maendeleo in Rarieda, Gheto FM in Pumwani, Koch FM in Korogocho, Pamoja FM in Kibra, Shinyalu FM in Kakamega, Milambo 103.8 FM in Migori, Mugambo Jyetu in Meru North, Oltoilo Le Maa 89.3 FM – Voice of the Maasai, Serian 88.9 FM, Radio Tarumbeta 90.4 FM in Ranen Adventist Conference and Radio Rameny 88.3 FM in Rongo (CAK, 2017).

2.1 Common uses of Community Radio

Reports from previous research conducted to establish types of broadcast content currently dominant in the aforementioned radio stations reveal that entertainment, news and announcements are the most prominent. In Migori County for example, at least 70% of broadcast time of the radios is dedicated to news and entertainment and only slightly more than 20% of broadcast hours is dedicated to participatory development education especially in agricultural knowledge and information sharing (Mac'Ouma et al 2018). Aloyce (2013) argues that community radio is the best avenue for local cultural production. His research found out that community radio stations are contributing to the production of local cultural content such as music. In view of these findings, we are called upon to debate whether CRs in Kenya are entertainment factories or potential catalysts of food and nutrition security and rural development.

2.2 Community Radio and Sustainable Agriculture

Community Radio (CR), which is widely acknowledged as the dominant medium for community expression in most parts of the world, is a potential tool for promotion of sustainable farming practices with the end result being a food and nutrition secure nation. CR disseminates content that is relatively easy to produce. Besides, radio receivers are still cheaper than television sets (Rennie 2006). The historical philosophy of Community Radios is to use this medium as the voice of the voiceless and the mouthpiece of oppressed people, or by communities that have not been served by conventional communication infrastructures (Ngugi, 2015). According to Serveas (2009), the notion of Participatory Communication stresses the importance of cultural identity of local communities, and of democratization and participation at all levels. Serveas further argues that in order to share information, knowledge trust and commitment in development projects, participation is very important in any decision making process for development.

Borrowing from Paulo Freire's ideas on education, conscientization and participatory development, CR could ingeniously be deployed by development actors as a game changing platform for the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices in rural areas of Kenya. Freire's theory of dialogical communication and action is based on group dialogue rather than the mass media (Sarveas, 2009).

According to a report by Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 2014), a decisive role can be played by communication technologies in promoting human capacity development for Food Security in Africa. The report further states "experience demonstrates that sustainable Agricultural development is based less on material inputs (e.g. seeds and fertilizer) than on the people involved in their use". It argues that investments in scientific and material inputs for Agricultural production bear little fruit without parallel investments in people. To this end, communication technologies are powerful tools for informing people and providing them with the knowledge and skills they need in order to put Agricultural science and production inputs to best use. Findings by previous researchers such as; (Ochichi, 2014, GoK, 2009, FAO, 2015 and World Bank, 2017) all agree that agriculture, the second largest contributor to Kenya's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), is the best bet for a rapid attainment of Kenya's Vision 2030 as well as SDG No. 2 which is about ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agriculture. However, the impacts of climate change, high cost of farm input and low levels of technological adoption have remained a big hindrance to successful implementation of sustainable agricultural practices, especially in rural areas. Community radios normally have programme types such as drama, adverts, talk shows, music and live call-ins (Ochichi, 2014). Planned use of communication technologies can also help people exchange experiences and actively participate in and guide development activities.

A report published by The International Food Policy Research Institute entitled "Making Information and Communication Technologies Work for Food Security in Africa" states that knowledge and information are important factors for accelerating Agricultural production and improving marketing and distribution. The report roots for the use of ICT to enhance knowledge and skills dissemination to smallholder farmers in Africa. The report mentions the telephone as the only ICT used by majority of farmers in Africa. It notes that ICT enables the exchange of information about innovations in crop varieties, pest control, fertilizer application, weather forecasting, irrigation and efficient monitoring methods. The study recommends the integration of traditional Agricultural information systems such as radio broadcasting. This recommendation resonates very well with the key mandate of World Association of Community Broadcasters – AMARC (1988). AMARC emphasises that community radio ought to respond to the needs of the community it serves by contributing to its development within progressive perspectives in favour of social change. Rural radio has

been a consistently strong performer for the last 50 years (Busolo, 2013) and remains one of the most cost effective means of disseminating development information.

Madamombe, (2005), observes that their transmitters may only reach a few miles, but community radio stations are enabling isolated communities across Africa to voice their own concerns. On air, ordinary citizens discuss issues that are central to them such as gender relations and combating Hiv/Aids. He adds that they share farming tips and income generation ideas and explore ways to improve education. Colin Fraser and Sonia Restrepo – Estrada (2002) illustrate the role of a radio station, owned and run by a community, in providing the forum for the participatory, public dialogue which is essential for social change. The two further argue that community media, and in particular radio, can provide the platform through which people can define who they are, what they want, and how to get it while at the same time building long-term capacity to solve problems in ways that lead to sustainable social change and development.

In many parts of the world today, community radio acts as a vehicle for the community and voluntary sector, civil society, agencies, NGOs and citizens to work in partnership to promote community development. A few examples of such noble initiatives are mentioned here. Project Radio Madagascar is a rural radio project for regional development in Southern Madagascar funded by the European Commission Food and Security Division. The project delivers information to isolated rural village populations in the southern parts of the country via Freeplay radios with the aim of empowering local people to help improve their standards of living - in particular, by developing programmes to promote practical ways of increasing food security and reducing the effects of poverty. The project collaborates with 16 local FM radio partners, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and service providers that form an association called Partners for Communication and Information for Development (PCID) (www.comminit.com).

A partnership between Rongo University and the University of Brighton UK, which seeks to set up a community radio station in Cham gi Wadu within South Kamagambo location in Kenya, is on the verge of concluding a participatory baseline survey and needs assessment preceding the establishment of the radio station. Data obtained using Partnership Education Action Research and Learning Scenarios – PEARLS (Day et al, 2014) methodology between 2016 and 2018 indicate overwhelming community support for the project. The most prominent reason for support is the belief and knowledge that if established, the radio station will provide a participatory forum for community dialogue on issues of development and rural empowerment.

3.0 Design and methodology

The study was a qualitative design based on a social constructivism approach. Focus was on the roles that social interaction and social processes play in creating knowledge (Jwan and On'gondo, 2011). Thus, a feedback survey was deployed, using questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGDs) and telephone calls as instruments to generate research data. The instruments are scientifically ideal for the qualitative research model which the researcher had opted for. A series of questions and prompts generated sufficient data on the local knowledge and opinion about the role of community radio in the attainment of national development goals. Questionnaires were administered upon 50 students of journalism and/or media studies from Rongo University. On the other hand, a focus group discussion assisted in obtaining data from ten community stakeholders. The ten are currently involved in a baseline survey for the establishment of a Community Radio station at Cham gi Wadu in Migori, Kenya. Additional data was obtained though telephone interviews involving the researcher and three programme managers currently working for local Community Radio

stations. For purposes of triangulation, additional data was obtained from "chance findings" of a previous study Mac'Ouma et al (2018).

3.1 Sample size and data collection instruments

The research employed a survey approach which considered a sample size of fifty journalism and media studies students from Rongo University, ten community stakeholder representatives in an ongoing scoping for the establishment of a community radio station at Cham gi Wadu in South Kamagambo, Kenya and three community radio programme managers, one each from Milambo Radio 103.8 FM, Radio Tarumbeta 90.4 FM and Radio Rameny 88.3 FM.

In the selection of participants, convenience sampling was deployed since the 50 students, 10 community stakeholder representatives and 3 community radio programme managers were not only of great relevance to the study, but also within easy reach of the researcher. Further, purposive selection was preferred on account of the fact that the researcher considered the sample a perfect representation of public voices on the matter under investigation. Most of participants had previously listened to community views on the potential role of Community Radio in the attainment of national development goals. This occurred during collaborative baseline studies conducted by journalism and media students from the University of Brighton, UK and Rongo University, Kenya. Scoping on community needs, priorities, and geo-mapping of assets to facilitate establishment of a Community Radio at Cham gi Wadu were conducted between 2016 and 2018. On the other hand, convenience and purposive sampling of the three programme managers was on account of their position as gate-keepers of crucial information and data related to the research.

Table 1: Sample category, gender, age and size:

Category	Male	female	Age	Total
Journalism/media students	22	28	20-25	50
Community stakeholders	5	5	45-56	10
CR Program Managers	2	1	3-40	3
Total	**27**			**63**

3.2 Data analysis and results:

Data analysis was based on the following: questionnaire responses from journalism and media students from Rongo University, field notes from a focus group discussion with community stakeholders in the proposed Cham gi Wadu Community Radio project and telephone interviews with programme managers working for three conveniently sampled radio stations. The researcher then proceeded to conduct a thematic analysis of participants' responses. Thematic analysis (TA) is a widely-used qualitative data analysis method. The method involved emphasizes pinpointing, examining and recording patterns within themes (Pierre, and Jackson, 2014). The researcher performed this procedure through a process of coding in six phases namely; assembling and classification of data, reading data, re-reading data, familiarization with data, coding data, and matching data with interview questions on the questionnaire, face-to-face interviews as well as telephone responses.

4.0 Discussion, conclusion and recommendations

Analyzed data indicate that all questionnaire respondents were students of journalism and or/ Media Studies in Rongo University aged between 20-25 years. 55% female and 45% male. FGD participants included five female and five male aged between 45-56 years. On the other hand Community Radio programme managers who participated in the survey consisted of one female and two male. All of the respondents had previous field research experience related to community media and/or journalism within Kenya. Responses to questions on their knowledge and opinion about the role of community radio (CR) in the attainment of national development goals were somewhat corroborating given that the aforesaid participants constituted a larger fraction of a focus group.

Asked to explain to what extent community radio programmes were responsive to the needs of the host community, majority responded that CRs, only to a fair extent had programmes which responded to the needs and priorities of the host communities. Some of the needs mentioned included news, spiritual nourishment, advertisement and entertainment.

Majority of the respondents indicated that local residents believe that food, health, nutrition, sanitation, peace, security and general development are priority issues that should be tackled by Community Radio programmes. Further on, majority of respondents indicated a high level of awareness of the potential role of Community Radio in the attainment of national development goals. Respondents mentioned education programmes on agriculture, health, climate change, ICT, environment and water management, adult education, sanitation, Hiv/Aids awareness as some of the most important issues of development that could be disseminated through community radio programmes.

The study confirmed that rural dwellers thought food security was a very important issue and that Community Radio stations could be deployed as a platform for development dialogue and agricultural information exchange to increase smallholder farming productivity, enhance food security and improve rural livelihoods. However, lack of involvement of local residents in design of radio programmes and the fact that radio programmes were rarely aligned to the needs and priorities of the host community were cited as challenges to effective deployment and use of CR as a catalyst for rural development and social change. In response to a question which asked, "As a journalism/media student, what did you learn about Community Radio in relation to the national development goals?" One of the respondents had this to say "Community Radio should be a platform whereby the community residents air out their voices and get education on various issues in order to improve on their living standards". Another respondent had this to say, "if used well, Community Radio would be a big step towards realizing the Vision 2030".

The survey respondents mentioned several challenges experienced by rural dwellers in Kenya. They include the following: low literacy levels, low levels of income, irregular income, lack effective channels for dialogue, lack of innovative agricultural knowledge and skills, poor road network, lack of nutrition education, unemployment, high rates of drop-out from school, lack of regular supply of clean water, high prevalence of diseases such as Malaria, diarrhoea, Hiv/Aids as well as illnesses caused by under-nutrition. The findings revealed that most community radio programmes focused on entertainment, listening-in group calls to say greeting, jokes, jibes and news. Even though such programmes play a role in enhancing community cohesion and peace, they relegate priority issues such as food security, adaptation to climate change and its impact and rural development to the peripheries of mainstream programmes menu.

The above findings resonate well with findings from previous research on the same theme. For example, Naaikuur, and Diedong, (2014) conducted a study whose aim was to determine the use of broadcasting as an educational tool. The case study concluded that Simli Radio in Ghana has worked to improve awareness and knowledge of solutions to community development, education, hygiene and sanitation, agriculture and local governance. Furthermore, Ecuador, Jamaica, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Ghana and Senegal, are additional examples of nations where community radio has effectively been used as a catalyst for rural development (Ngugi, 2015). Rural communities in Kenya have largely been relegated to the periphery of the mainstream socio-economic and political development conversation (Anduvade, 2014). In response, UNESCO has been actively promoting community radio as an important agent for change and development since the early 1980s.

As a "chance finding", It emerged during a study entitled "Community Radio programming and peace promotion during political campaigns in Kenya: A case of Migori County", Mac'Ouma et al (2018) that Community Radios have got a huge, but unexploited potential to advance a rapid attainment of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals # 1 and 2.

4.1 Conclusion

From the discussions above, several conclusions are hereby generated. Survey findings indicate CR's ability to reach wider audiences in rural areas, and that majority of rural dwellers in Kenya rely on radio for information. Therefore, if the potential of CR is harnessed well, it could be a useful catalyst for development and faster attainment of Kenya's vision 2030, especially in regards to food and nutrition security.

4.2 Recommendations

In order for CR to fully support the attainment of national development initiatives, stakeholders in development such as the National Government of Kenya, County governments, researchers, the donor community, non-governmental organizations, NGK-CDF should consider a more robust and productive use of available Community Radios for participatory exchange of development knowledge and information. Secondly, Community Radio programme managers should invest more in initiatives that facilitate development of radio programmes with participation of residents of the host community. This way, needs, priorities and voices of the community will become part of the broadcast content.

In recent years, research has been conducted to breed high-yielding stress tolerant seeds suitable for semi-arid regions in Kenya. Such efforts have yielded improved seed varieties of sorghum (Gudu et al., 2016), sorghum (Oduori et al., 2016), beans (CIAT, 2014, 2015, 2016) and (Maina, et al., 2016), peanuts and maize (Ligeyo, et al 2014), (Monsanto, 2015). These varieties are currently available and capable of reducing the worrying yield

gaps. Even though a total of seven community radios operate in the region (CAK, 2016) they lack programmes specifically designed to promote rural public engagement on climate change. Policy should be enacted that ensures a closer collaboration among farmers, researchers, agro-dealers, extension workers and community broadcasting stations. Such partnerships could facilitate development of radio programmes with the aim of out-scaling agricultural research findings in rural areas. Lastly, more students should be encouraged to study community media/journalism and conduct further research on the same.

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