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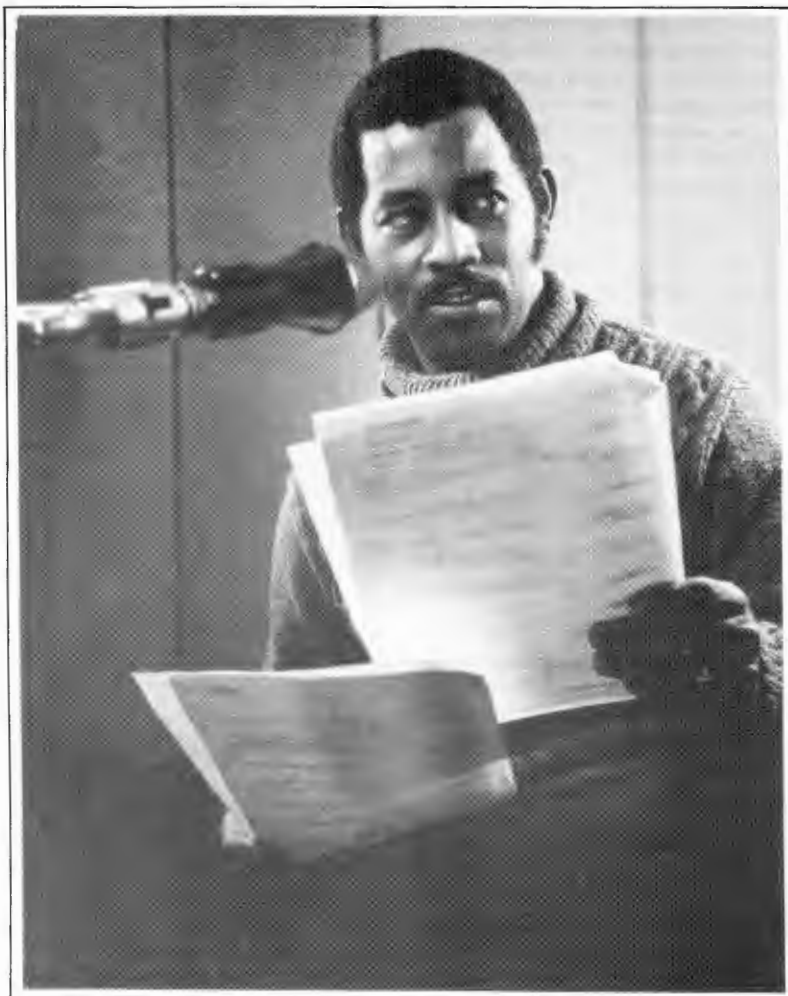
EDUCATIONAL BROADCASTING INTERNATIONAL



FILM and SEMIOTICS

A local radio strategy for Nigeria

Part 3



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Programming

We have already talked about the organization of programmes, and about community involvement, co-ordination and interaction in programming. What we are concerned with now is air-time allocation and programme materials. It is not intended to lay down any hard-and-fast rules. That would nullify the effects of the flexibility which the involvement in programming of the community and other educational/development agencies will entail. Nor are we going to lay down specifications as to timing and styles of programmes. These should be decided by the Programme and Utilization Committee, based on initially identified needs of the communities, and later on

reactions from the people and from listening/discussion groups. The intention here is to say a few words about air-time allocation, and to point the way to what materials should be available for programming in the rural areas.

Like the Provincial Broadcasting Houses (now being phased out), the proposed local radio stations should be on the air for 18½ hours a day, that is from 5.30 am to 12 midnight. But, unlike them, these new stations should spend more time broadcasting local programmes. There are four possible sources of programmes for a local radio station. These are the local station itself, the national network, the State

station, and the other local stations. Of these, programmes emanating from the local station itself should take up the greater part of the broadcasting day. This is to ensure that the local station is not only seen to be local, but also, in its activities, shows itself to be truly local. We are therefore proposing that the block allocation of air-time should be something like this:

- (i) 6 - 8 hours, for purely locally-oriented programmes;
- (ii) 2 - 3 hours, for 'mandatory' joining of National and State stations for news and other items of high national and State importance. This is intended to allay the fears of local stations encouraging parochialism and endangering national unity;
- (iii) 1 - 2 hours, for rebroadcast of programmes from other local stations, which are of relevance and importance. This exchange of programmes will enable local radio areas to learn from one another;
- (iv) 5 - 6 hours, for opt-ins* to National and State stations for network materials. This should NOT be at periods when listenership is at, or near, its peak in the rural areas. Such periods should be *priority* periods for locally-oriented programmes.

Initially, this allocation could be modified to suit local circumstances. But it is hoped that it would not take a long time to establish the recommended balance, and as time goes on, to increase the time allocated to purely locally-oriented programmes.

Availability of materials

The other issue we want to talk about here is the availability of programme materials. This is necessary because one of the questions often asked when one talks about full-scale local broadcasting is this: from where will the materials for the local programmes come? The shortest answer to the question, of course, is 'from the locality'. But there is more to it. Behind the question is a basic unfortunate assumption that the rural areas are not programme-worthy. This, in effect, is saying that rural people live a very dull and uninteresting life and so have very little worthwhile to offer to broadcasting. Clearly the question shows how very little the urban 'elite' know or are prepared to admit about the lives and customs of three-quarters of the nation's population who live in the rural areas. To them, the rural people are nothing more than poor ignorant and docile illiterates who have nothing to teach the 'modern' man.

This unfortunate assumption is rooted partly in the craze for crime and violence, sensation and the spectacular, in the mass media. Because there are no blistering political activities in the rural areas; because there are no bank robberies, no embezzlement of government funds, no strikes, hardly any rapes, murders and riots, the rural areas are considered not

*This is the practice whereby one radio station 'A' stops broadcasting its own programmes, and allows programmes from another station 'B' to go through its (A's) transmitters to the listening public. It is an optional action, depending on whether or not A wants the programmes. The opposite — opt-out — means that A, which is *expected* to allow programmes from B to go through its transmitters to its audience, has specific time or times during which it can put on its own programmes.

only not newsworthy but also not rich in programme materials. But the culture and tradition of the nation have their roots in the rural areas; the natural environment of the country is to be found in the rural areas; and it is the social sanctions and way of life peculiar to the rural areas which have made it difficult for the 'urbanized' crimes mentioned above to have much effect on life there.

Potential of the rural areas

It is important to point out that local broadcasting is meant to provide an opportunity both for learning from the rural areas, and also for preserving what is good within these areas. More importantly, local broadcasting will offer the people the opportunity to learn new ways and new techniques, and to teach themselves in order to change the economically static character of their living, and make it dynamic and vital, and also to train their minds to become active and adventurous. New situations lead to new experiences.

Intimate contact with rural people will reveal that they have a lot to offer to urban and educated people, just as they have a lot to learn from them. Local broadcasting will provide a platform for a mutual exercise in learning between, not only the 'learned' urban dwellers and the illiterate but knowledgeable majority in the rural areas, but more importantly, between the rural population and the rulers of the nation.

It is clear that there is an infinite potentiality in the rural areas for programming. The materials are there; what has been lacking is the effort to make use of them. Partly because of the wrong assumption that the rural areas have little to offer, and partly because of the limited air-time allotted to programmes meant for the rural population, there has been very little effort made to identify fully the possible programme materials that exist in the rural areas. There has also been very little done to produce those programmes which will benefit the rural people. All this goes to confirm even more strongly the need for building local radio stations. For if the rural population is to be educated for development, half measures will not do. It must be an education which runs through the whole spectrum of human activities in the rural areas. And it must be based on a strategy which gives priority to the aims of *participation, communication, and expression* rather than to those of distribution and transmission.

The local radio strategy that has been proposed in this series of articles will meet these requirements. It will provide the opportunity to ensure that more time is spent on broadcasting to rural communities; that local materials form the basis of programming; and that more efforts are made to harness these materials to advantage. The nearness of stations to the target audiences will ensure good reception signals. Producers living and working within the communities and making use of local resources will be in a position to understand the people, their mode of communication and the context and content of their cultural and social universe. This will ensure that identical meanings obtain between producers and their audiences, and also that programme contents are relevant. And the system of Listening Groups, where programmes are discussed and decisions are taken after careful group examination of the issues involved, will evoke in rural people the desire for involvement and awaken the spirit of commitment to agreed decisions.