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**MEDIA
ECONOMICS**

A local radio strategy for Nigeria

Part I

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There are four broadcasting organizations in Nigeria. The first and most widely dispersed is the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) owned by the Federal Government. The other three are owned respectively by the three former regional governments of the North, the East and the West.

The Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation has headquarters in Lagos and stations in eighteen of the newly created States, of course, the stations are not all of equal transmitter capacity. The NBC is the only network in the country with six principal transmitters, one each in Lagos, Ibadan, Benin, Enugu, Kaduna and Maiduguri. The other twelve stations were, before the creation of the new States, Provincial Broadcasting Houses, mainly serving as relay stations but devoting about 10% of their air-time to 'local' programmes. After the creation of the States, six of these twelve stations were up-graded * to the status of State Broadcasting Stations of the NBC. All the stations, without exception, are in urban areas, and remain on the air for about 18½ hours a day. They spend about two hours a day broadcasting programmes specifically meant for rural communities†. The Corporation claims that it has an audience of about 42 million¹.

The other broadcasting organizations—The Western Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation in Ibadan, the Eastern States Broadcasting Corporation based at Enugu and the Broadcasting Company of Northern

Nigeria, at Kaduna—all have one station only. Like the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, they broadcast for about 18½ hours a day, spending a very small amount of their air-time on programmes specifically meant for the education of rural communities.

The Broadcasting Company of Northern Nigeria differs slightly from the others. Almost all its English programmes are also broadcast in the Hausa Language. This, of course, does not mean that these programmes are specifically for rural people. They are mainly (except for the university-produced programmes) the usual programmes of news, entertainment and music. However, the use of a language which the people speak at least gives the rural population the chance to understand what is being said. So potentially this station is likely to have a wider audience than the other two. This goes some way towards explaining why so many of the rural people in the North own radios. A large proportion of the farmers, petty traders and even the itinerant pastoral Fulani, possess transistors. However, the Broadcasting Company has not made use of this situation for promoting rural education.

Although the rural population in the country far outweighs the urban by a ratio of about four to one, the amount of time spent by any of the nation's radio stations on the rural communities is far less than that spent on the urban population. Even the Provincial Broadcasting Houses which when they were set up, were seen as an attempt to take broadcasting to the people, simply followed the national and state stations of the NBC in allotting only 10% of their air-time to rural programmes. In effect, the limited attempts to change life for the better in rural com-

* This upgrading was merely in name. There were slight changes in staffing and programmes, but not in hardware or area coverage. However, plans are on hand for an overall upgrading.

† These are programmes meant to raise the consciousness and knowledge level of rural people. Such programmes include those on Farming, Government, Civic responsibility, Sanitation, Child-care and Self-Help.



Grass-roots radio—something with which the people can identify.

munities have been hampered by the communication strategy adopted, thus leaving the rural population with little or no benefits from the nation's broadcasting activities.

How can radio communication be effective?

Three factors are necessary for any radio communication to be successful. The first is that the transmitter must be capable of taking the message to the target audience in a clear and audible manner. The second is that the message must be in a code and context that is understandable to the audience. These two factors—clear reception and intelligibility—are imperative for what we may term communication 'effectiveness', that is, *getting the message to the audience in such a way that it will understand the context and meaning*. But that is not the end of the story. Hearing a radio message and understanding it, though very necessary and important prerequisites, do not necessarily assure 'effectiveness', that is, *acceptance of the message and willingness to act upon it*. This third factor is better and more easily achieved if the message is reinforced by personal contact and peer group discussions². It is of prime importance that the message should be seen as relevant by the audience, that what is asked for should not be too far removed from what is familiar, and the possibility of beneficial results should not be too remote. These conditions will only obtain if there is sufficient contact between senders of messages and receivers of the messages. The existing radio stations can, between them, reach a wide-segment of the rural population. But because of the cultural gap between the urban oriented and educated radio producers and the rural oriented and illiterate audiences, intelligibility is hard to achieve. This defect is heightened by the fact that the producers are trying to affect life in a social environment quite different from the one within which they are operating. They tend to use their own ideas instead of first-hand information gathered from the rural areas.

The feeling that rural populations can be affected by radio messages from producers and stations physically and socially distant from the people is based on the erroneous conviction that the 'preaching' approach to communication can succeed with any type of message. But there is a world of difference between the reaction of the audience to information intended to raise their hopes and aspirations and that intended to stimulate their motivation and willingness to work in order to satisfy these aspirations. Informing impoverished rural people of the quality of life in urban areas and of their right to such a life is to hit directly at their instinct for survival and equality. To inform them that the Head of State has been assassinated is to evoke their emotional feelings. Reactions to such messages are usually instant. It is, however, a different story with the kind of broadcasts that call upon the people to rise up and work to help themselves so that they can improve their way of life. Reaction to this type of message will depend largely on how far the sender of the information has been acquainted with the conditions of the people, how far the people can believe him, how far the content of the message is built upon the code and context familiar to the people. What is being asked for here is not merely the mental exercise of comparing two standards of life, but also the physical efforts necessary to achieve a higher standard of living. To be

accepted, this greater demand requires the intervention of the social forces that guide the people's lives. Sufficient knowledge of, and acquaintance with, these forces are not easy to acquire outside the rural areas. To expect such a message to be effective without the sender entering into the social context of the people is to expect miracles to happen. In the rural setting, the 'alien expert' is worth nothing until he can prove his worth, and this means being a good listener rather than a good talker; recognizing the worth of the people, their customs and beliefs; accepting and fraternizing with their leaders; and building on the accumulated knowledge of the people, which has sustained them for centuries. All this is best done on the spot; hence the need to have local radio stations if the medium of radio is to be effective in helping to mobilize and motivate rural human resources for national development.

Furthermore, the villager is not as individualized as his urban counterpart. His decisions are not actually his as an individual; they are the decisions already set down or presently agreed upon by the community to which he belongs. In order to be able to affect such group or community-based decisions, radio has to recognize and make use of the internal communication system of rural communities and involve rural people in its activities, directed towards improving the social, economic and political conditions of the rural areas.

Policy implications

The proposal that Nigeria should launch a Rural Development Programme based on the extensive use of local radio follows from an analysis of the various radio strategies in use in different developing countries, and an examination of the local radio systems operating in the United Kingdom. The proposal is therefore an attempt to combine the good and workable (in the Nigerian context) qualities of the existing radio strategies with the adaptable characteristics of the British local radio systems, so as to produce a strategy—Local Radio Strategy—which, in our view, will be very effective in the task of rural community education, provided it is operated efficiently. The strategy will take radio stations and producers to the people and so will ensure that producers live among the people and understand their



2. A group of farmers listening to a radio programme.

culture and world perception; provide an easy access to the medium for the people. It will also ensure that the people not only have an avenue for expressing their opinions but also for participating in deciding what they want to learn and in producing the programmes.

Provision of radio stations

The first step towards achieving this efficient system of operation is the provision of radio stations at points where access to them would be easier for rural communities than it is now. It is therefore suggested that low-powered transmitters and simple stations of the type earlier built at provincial levels should be built at district levels all over the country. To begin with experimental stations should be built at divisional levels. The ultimate aim should be to provide *one local radio station* for every district council area in the country. A local station of this kind should act as a mouthpiece for the local people and elicit from them a feeling of ownership and commitment.

Two objections have been raised against a local radio system in Nigeria. The first is that the cost would be exorbitant. Those who raise this objection have not, however, said against what yardstick the expected high cost is being measured, neither have they given any statistical figures to support their reckoning. One must also point out that there is no alternative which has the potential of effectiveness which a well-operated local radio system has, and yet promises to be cheaper. If the task of educating the rural population, who constitute about 80% of the country's man-power, is seen as a priority in national development, then the cost of the project should not deter from action but rather should lead to plans for spreading the financial burden over a period of time. Secondly, one finds it difficult to reconcile the objection, on account of cost, against a local radio system which will serve the majority of the people, with the avid willingness of State governments to establish, at costs running into several millions of naira, television stations which serve only about 10% of the population. It is not, however, the intention here to go into financial calculations. This is because of the conviction that Nigeria can, if she wants to, comfortably establish low-powered (and that means also low-cost) transmitting stations in every district. Electronic engineers³ say that the cost of building a moderate television station of the type we have in Nigeria is more than sufficient to build twenty well-equipped, low-powered radio stations. Now that the Federal Government has taken over the already established television stations from the States which had them, and has accepted responsibility for establishing any new stations, State governments are in a good position to concentrate on radio station expansion. It is suggested that this expansion should take the form of providing local stations in all their district council areas. In the words of the Scottish Broadcasting Council:

It is our view that the needs of people living in remoter areas are very much greater than those with the multiple facilities of towns and cities available to them. The provision of adequate viewing and listening for such communities should be given high priority, coming before other more exciting, but in our opinion less essential, broadcasting developments. The provision of community radio is urgently desirable.⁴

Political objections

The other objection to establishing a local radio system in the country is a political one. It is argued that because of the need to forge a united country, it is not advisable to build local radio stations because they are likely to make people 'look inwards' and so accentuate tribal and ethnic differences. In our view, this argument is far from strong. If States can be created in order to help build a united Nigeria; if district councils can be established in order to help the Federal and State governments in the task of governing, there is no reason why a local radio station cannot be used to play a unifying role. If people do not articulate themselves and their place in the nation, it is doubtful that they will be able to play a constructive political role in nation-building. If political policies and values are to have any meaning they must be the consequence of *understanding acceptance* and not the result of *reluctant obedience* to imposed regulations and political manipulations.

Local radio offers a chance of putting national policies and plans across to the people in the context in which such policies and plans will be best understood. It will provide a means for the people to air their views and thus help in enlisting the participation of the ordinary man in the government of the country. The inaccessibility of the present radio establishments to the rural population has contributed a lot to the people's apathy. And apathy or ignorance is no guarantee of acceptance or conformity! An accessible radio station will facilitate the two-way flow of communication from leaders to the people and vice versa, and thus will provide a surer way of inculcating in the rural population the advantages of unity. Local radio stations, broadcasting in local languages, can contribute to the understanding and solution of local problems and also give their audiences an opportunity to respond through an appropriate feedback system, provided the stations adopt what Paul Hurst has called 'a *marketing approach* rather than a *selling one*'.⁵ This means finding out the needs of the people, not prescribing what producers think the people's needs ought to be. It also means determining what the people's circumstances are, what they can afford and what they are capable of assimilating. These factors will help instil confidence in the people, and so elicit positive attitudes towards national unity and national development.

References

1. *West Africa* No. 3074, 31st May 1976, p. 772
2. For a detailed discussion on Peer-Group teaching, see S. Thiagarajan: 'Madras system revisited; a new system for peer tutoring' *Educational Technology*, Vol. 13, No. 12, December 1973, pp. 10-13
3. This rough estimate was given by BBC engineers when the writer was in London for participant observation at a local radio station. The estimate is based on a £60 000 expenditure on each low-powered transmitting station.
4. Broadcasting Council of Scotland: *Memorandum to the Committee on the Future of Broadcasting*, 1974. (Scotland is a region with problems of scattered rural population, although not to the same degree as we have in Nigeria).
5. Paul Hurst: 'Educational Technology and Innovations in the Third World' in *Educational Broadcasting International*, Vol. 8, No. 4, December 1975, pp. 160-165.