

Right to Communicate: Experts Seek Pluralistic Definition

Experts representing a diversity of cultural traditions, political thought and economic systems met in Stockholm, Sweden, on 8 to 12 May 1978, to deliberate on the Right to Communicate. The meeting *Towards a Definition of the Right to Communicate* was the first in a series of six being organized and sponsored by UNESCO "to study the ways and means by which active participation in the communication process may become possible and to analyze the right to communicate."

MULTI-VALENT CONCEPT

The meeting noted, first of all, that the Right to Communicate is still an evolving concept requiring deeper study before a precise formulation of its scope and nuances could be reached. Such a formulation would have to be multi-valent, reflecting that both the understanding and the exercise of the Right will necessarily vary according to specific cultures and systems. It would also naturally be modified by given levels of socio-economic-cultural development, although the level of development alone and without "conscious, continuous endeavours towards genuine democratization of social life and system (sic)" does

not in itself promote or enhance the Right to Communicate. On the other hand, the formation and execution of a body of communication policy was considered essential to the realization of the Right.

COMPONENT RIGHTS

The meeting saw the Right to Communicate as being made up of a number of component rights, such as the right to Participate, the right to Inform and Receive Information, and the right to Access to communication resources, with each component having greater or lesser weight in differing milieus.

Participants agreed on the need for active participation in the communication process and remarked that, in fact, the concept of communication itself had changed from one that was one-way and vertical to one that is interactive and horizontal. Especially in the light of this new understanding of the communication process, the definition of the Right to Information as contained in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was considered inadequate and the need to establish the Right to Communicate as a legal concept, brought out.

ACCESS AND TECHNOLOGY

Concern was expressed over the imbalance in access to communication resources and consensus reached on the need to develop new communication structures as well as to transform existing ones, especially the large mass media structures. Programmes to increase the availability of the means of communication in "communication-poor" areas and among minority and/or tra-

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Local Radio Vital to Rural People's Exercise of Right to Communicate

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(The following is a condensation of a paper "The Right to Communicate: The Rural Population - Access to and Participation in Broadcast Communication" delivered at the Experts' Meeting Towards a Definition of the Right to Communicate held in Stockholm in May 1978. Mr. Moemeka is the Head of the Distance Teaching Department, Centre for Adult Education and Extension Services, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria.)

In an essentially rural community where illiteracy is high and modern communication facilities scarce, the exercise of the right to communicate demands more than is obvious. While communication in developed countries aims at sustaining and improving developmental advancement already made, in developing countries, it aims, or should aim, at inducing and encouraging development-oriented activities. In Africa, we view the right to communicate not as a right for its own sake, but as a right arising out of the need to foster the physical and mental development of the individual, encourage intelligent co-existence among individuals and among communities and to advance national development.

Progress and development are the justification of everyone's right to communicate. If the minimum standard of living as advocated by the United Nations is considered a right for every human being, the knowledge to achieve it becomes a right. To acquire this knowledge, communication between individuals, between groups, between nations, and between the governors and the governed is indispensable. In rural communities such as we have in Africa, this communication has

to be induced, nurtured and facilitated. For us, therefore, the right to communicate involves not only the free and multi-way exchange of information, ideas and opinions, but also the provision of communication hardware and infrastructure as well as the maintenance of an enabling atmosphere in which tradition-conscious individuals can take part in the communication process and utilize the ensuing conclusions effectively. In fact, the exercise of the right to communicate is impossible without, first, access to the media of communication, and second, participation in the communication process.

Access and participation, however, are 'high-class' commodities in the communication market in Africa. Because of the high rate of illiteracy, the scarcity of modern communication hardware, the poverty of the people, and other factors such as scattered, low-density population and difficult terrains, a very large proportion of the population in Africa is cut off from the mainstream of the communication process. For them the right to communicate is virtually not exercised beyond the narrow confines of each local community; even the right to information is curtailed.

Radio, television and the newspaper are the best-known media of mass communication in Africa. None of these, for one reason or another, is sufficiently accessible to the rural population. The newspaper, for example, cannot be used for direct communication with rural communities in Africa because such communities are usually illiterate. Television, too, has not been of much help -- stations are built in cities far removed from the rural population; the cost of receiving sets is prohibitive for the rural and sub-urban man: about 85% of Africans. Yet even if there were more sets to go around, the communication situation would have been that of exercising the Right to Information and not the Right to Communicate. For the exercise of the right to communicate demands not only access to consumption but also access to production. No African country as of now can afford to establish enough television stations to ensure equitable access for all its citizens.

Radio would appear to be the answer to the problem of access to communication for rural communities. Radio is cheap; it is widely owned. Apart from its well-known characteristics such

as the ability to beat distances and literacy barriers, as well as immediacy and 'an individualistic touch', it is the only medium of mass communication with which rural communities are familiar.

This, of course, is not to say that Radio is the simple answer to the problems associated with the effective exercise of the Right to Communicate. The use of radio encounters problems, problems which are almost peculiar to developing countries and particularly evident in Africa where broadcasting has been directed to the small minority of educated citizens and the city-dwellers. The result of this imbalanced approach is that during the limited period in which broadcast communication filters into the rural areas, content materials are merely thrust down on the people. Obviously, effective communication, let alone the exercise of the Right to Communicate, cannot take place under such a working relationship. Yet the only hope for the effective exercise of the Right to Communicate in rural Africa lies in the use of radio. How, using this medium and the limited resources available, can the best results be obtained? The answer to this question lies in identifying an appropriate programme strategy along with ways and means of producing relevant quality programmes and in finding a workable system of cooperation between producers of programmes and their consuming audiences.

It could be argued that rural populations do listen to programmes intended for them. However, listening to a programme is not necessa-

rily accepting the message contained in the programme. Such one-way communications only allow the exercise of the Right to Information. As far as development is concerned, the important question is: how far do these programmes affect those who listen to them in rural areas?

Three factors are necessary for any radio communication to be successful. First, the transmitter must be capable of taking the message to the target audience in a clear and audible manner. Second, 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', i.e., getting the message to the audience in a way that it will understand the context and meaning. However, hearing a radio message and understanding it, though very important prerequisites, do not necessarily assure 'effectiveness', i.e., acceptance of the message and willingness to act accordingly. This third factor is better and more easily achieved if there has been interaction and exchange of opinion, and in the case of the rural population, if there is reinforcement through interpersonal communication and peer-group intervention. This presumes, of course, that the message content is seen as relevant by the audience, that what is being asked for is not too far removed from what is familiar, and that the possibility of beneficial results is not too remote. These conditions will only obtain if there is sufficient contact between senders and receivers of messages.

The existing system of broadcasting in Africa could make broadcast messages available to a wide segment of the rural population. However, because of the cultural gap between their urban-oriented and -educated producers and the rural-oriented and illiterate audiences, intelligibility is hard to come by. In addition, the Open Broadcast strategy does not offer much hope for effectiveness. In the rural setting where societal sanctions are strong and the individual is not just 'another human being' but a member of a group whose norms he is obliged to observe, open broadcasting has very little chance of inducing attitude change, which is the first requirement for development. Attitude change requires the intervention of the social forces that guide the people's lives.

The decisions of the illiterate or semi-literate villager 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 utilize the internal communication system of rural communities and involve people in its activities directed towards improving the social, economic and political conditions in the rural areas. Because communication in the rural setting is a question of attitude to one's neighbour, acceptance or rejection of new ideas is dependent on how such ideas will affect the established relationships. To avoid conflict with or de-

viation from the established way of life, many consultations are held between the people and their community leaders. This excellent example of the exercise of the Right to Communicate cannot be disregarded to advantage by the modern media of communication, especially radio which reaches more people in the rural areas than any other medium.

The implication of this is that radio broadcasting has to be extensively decentralized and based on a system of local broadcasting. This strategy will take radio stations and producers down to the people and so will ensure that producers live among the people and understand their culture and world perception. It will provide easy access to the medium for the people. Finally, it will ensure that the people not only have an avenue for expressing their opinion but also for participating in the decision-making process towards, and the actual production, of programmes.

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. For this purpose, it will be sufficient to build simple stations and provide low-power transmitters capable of covering approximately a 20-mile radius.

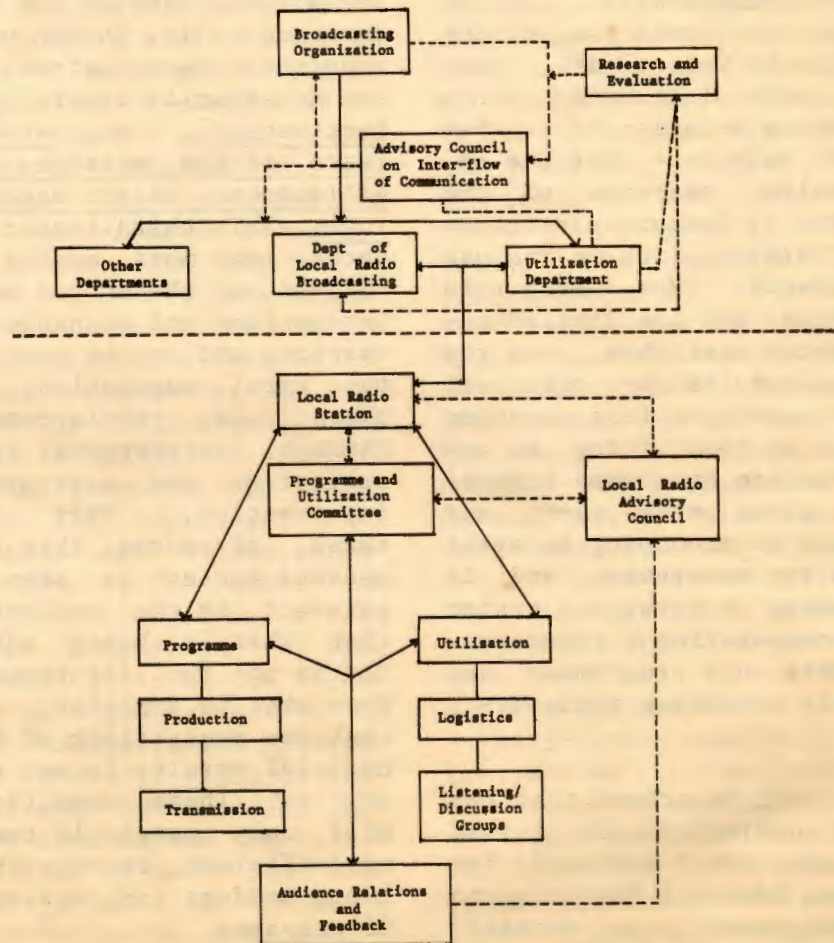
Two objections have been raised against localizing radio in African countries. The first is that the cost would be too exorbitant. If, however, developing nations can spend millions of pounds to establish televi-

sion stations for less than 20% of the population, there is no justification for not spending just above half of such amounts to establish a communication system that will benefit the remaining 80%.

The other objection to the localization of radio in Africa is a political one. It is being argued that because of the need to forge unity within and among the countries of the continent, it will not be advisable to build local radio stations which are likely to make people 'look inwards' and so accentuate tribal and ethnic differences. If, however, regional

governments can be created for the sole purpose of bringing government down to the village level, it is difficult to see why local radio 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 in a position to play a constructive political role in nation-building. To be meaningful, political, as well as social and economic, policies and values must be the result of understanding acceptance and not of reluctant obedience to imposed regulations and political manipulations from above.

Below is a possible organizational structure for the effective localization of radio, ensuring that just as policy and guidelines flow down from the authorities to the people, reactions and feedback will flow from the people to the authorities.



Local radio stations should remain within the national broadcasting set-up (a) to allow for expert advice and guidance of a professional and technical nature, (b) to facilitate smooth coordination and organization and (c) to enable the government to utilize the resources of local radio fully in furthering its rural development programmes.

Advisory Council on Interflow of Communication. To be composed of representatives of all government departments and voluntary agencies that have any responsibility to the rural population along with representatives of the national/state broadcasting organization(s). The Council should, in turn, be advised by *Specialist Committees* representing different aspects of rural life and including one concerned with programme utilization.

Department of Local Radio Broadcasting. Responsible for administration, briefings, audience research, and staff training as well as for ensuring that the general policy of the larger corporation is adhered to by the local stations. Supervises the officers in charge of the management of the different local stations.

Local Radio Advisory Council. To be appointed by the local government on the advice of its local committees and to be composed of representatives of the different groups, e.g., farmers, teachers, housewives, local councillors, local chiefs and village heads, within the area served by the station. Members also to serve as agents of programme utilization by helping in the organization and supervision of listening discussion groups.

Programme and Utilization Committee. To be composed of representatives of the *Local Radio Advisory Council* and of the local radio station together with one or two educationists and the personnel of other development agencies within the station's coverage area. Decides on programme materials and specifications as well as on production and presentation style and format. Also directly responsible for audience relations and feedback.

In order to be effective, radio has to be mediated by interpersonal communication conducted by people who know the particular circumstances of the audiences concerned, their customs and culture, the structure of their power hierarchy, and their system of internal communication. However, this two-step flow of communication has the disadvantage of concentrating 'power of knowledge' in the hands of a few; the intervention of local and opinion leaders should therefore be seen only as a supportive service to the direct communication between producers and listeners.

Apart from establishing rapport with members of the audience, broadcasting personnel need also to consult and interact with development extension agents working the station's coverage area. Such a relationship can be mutually beneficial, on the one hand providing the extension agents an instrument with which to overcome the impediments encountered by face-to-face communication and on the other hand providing the local station with additional help in the formation and supervision of listening discussion groups and in

the collection and reportage of audience feedback. The extension agents can, of course, also act as sources for and/or guides in the selection of programme material and the station, as a channel for the community to express its fears, hopes and aspirations about the work of the extension agents. Furthermore, the station can serve as a melting pot for the different agencies, providing an avenue for streamlining and coordinating their activities so that maximum benefit may accrue to the community.

There are four possible sources of programmes for a local radio station. There are the local station itself, the national network, the regional station, and 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. Block allocation of air-time over 20 broadcasting hours should therefore be made in the following or similar manner:

- a) 6 - 8 hours, for purely locally-oriented programmes.
- b) 2 - 3 hours, for 'mandatory' joining of national and regional/local stations for news and other items of national and regional significance. (This is intended to allay fears that local stations will encourage parochialism and threaten national unity.)
- c) 1 - 2 hours, for re-broadcast of relevant programmes from other

local stations. (This exchange of programmes will enable audiences from different coverage areas to learn from one another.)

- d) 5 - 6 hours, for opt-ins to national and regional stations for network material. (These should not be during prime listening time in the rural areas. Such periods should be priority periods for locally-oriented programmes.)

The other issue connected with programming is the availability of programme materials. People often ask: Where will the materials for local programmes come from? The answer, of

course, is: From the locality.

Behind the question, however, is the unfortunate assumption that rural areas are not programme-worthy. The assumption takes its roots partly from the craze for crime and violence, the sensational and the spectacular in the mass media. The media gloss over the fact that the culture and tradition of nations take their roots from the rural areas; that the natural environment of any country is to be found in the rural areas; and even that the social sanctions and way of life in the rural areas are to be found nowhere else. It is only when something dramatic happens in these rural areas that the nation

is awakened to their existence. The impression has therefore gained ground that not much is programme- and or news-worthy in the rural areas.

Without in any way supporting this prejudice, it must be pointed out that local broadcasting is meant to provide an avenue not only for learning from the rural areas but also for 'legitimizing' and preserving what is good in these areas. Intimate contact with rural people will reveal that they have a lot to offer to the educated and urbanized just as they have a lot to learn from them. Local broadcasting will provide a platform for mutual learning between the rural population and the rulers of the nation.

The chart below shows possible areas from which programme materials may be chosen and is a pointer to the infinite potential of the rural areas for programming. The materials are there; what has been lacking is the effort to utilize them.

Subject Areas	Programme Topics
Local News and Commentary	Same
Talks	Social, Economic and Developmental issues, Self-Help and Government plans, etc.
Local Events and Traditional Festivals	Same
Culture	Dance, Music, Arts, Traditional norms and values, dress, song, etc.
Folklore and History	Oral tradition and Story-telling about the past activities of the people and their ancestors - conquests, adventures, exploits, successes and failures, treaties and co-operations, etc.
Farming	Soil protection, hoeing and ploughing, fertilizer application, pest control, intensive farming, ridging and cropping, crop preservation, storage, marketing, pricing, etc.
Health	Sanitation, Personal hygiene, nutrition, rest, exercise, dangers of self-medication, the hospital, the health centre, the dispensary, preventive and curative treatment, drugs and medical advice, etc.
The Family	Marriage, family life, pregnancy and birth child-care, parental responsibility, family ties, informal education, moral standards, good examples, etc.
Civics	Rights, responsibilities, community commitment, respect and good manners, national unity and consciousness, etc.
Government	Federal Government, State Government, Local Government, national issues, etc.
The Schools	Specific programmes directed at helping teachers in teaching and pupils in learning. Other programmes aimed at bridging or eliminating the social gap between the school and the community, etc.