



Communities' Participation in Kenya through Community Radio Broadcasting Stations in Kenya on Development: A Critical Review

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Abstract

Communities have resorted to community radio stations as their means of expressing communities' issues, concerns, cultures and languages. There are more radio stations in the world and more listeners. Any notion that television will outnumber radio is unfounded, for radio has constant expansion. People living in a community have two things in common; cohesion and inclusion. This makes them homogeneous and communication is the only way to establish homogeneity. Discussions on community broadcasting are primarily within media parameters. Local radio stations promote reflection, local identity and character identity. These primordial promotions are key to any community development. Open access to on-air mode creates a way of establishing and examining issues and their solutions to determine development inputs that meets their needs. Community media are diverse on ethnic lines. In order to understand community radio stations embraces information flow, literacy and absorption in all developments and development agenda setting. It will give an overview of the features of community radio similar to other radio broadcastings; an appreciation of its position in the community in addition its revolution in Kenya.

Keywords: Communities; Participation; Development; Community broadcasting; Community Radio Stations; Kenya

Introduction

Community radio responds to the needs of community it serves, contributing to its development within progressive perspectives in favor of social change and development. Community radio strives to democratize communication through community participation in different forms in accordance with each specific context (World Association of community Broadcasters (AMARC)).

Community radios are non-profit organization's founded and owned by the community they serve. They are funded through a trust, foundations or even associations.

Though it's a form of public service broadcast they serve the community rather than the whole nation. It depends on community resources.

A community is a group of individuals with community characteristics and interests. The commonality is based on the geographical location, economic resources and social life.

Community radio is not after making profit. Several distinct features of community radio include; it is not aimed at making profits, the focus is based on particular communities and their main intention is to provide messages that are of social use to the community involved.

Media as a Tool for Social Change

Media has enormous impact on any society. The only gap is whether the media induced changes are good or bad for the community. It is also a question on how long it takes for media and products to cause change in the lifestyles of people [1]. Social change is effectively illustrated to a radio station owned by a community by providing a forum for platform participatory, public dialogue which is essential for social change. The radio station is essential platform for identifying community problems and analyzing problems and their solutions, thereby determining development inputs that meet local needs [2].

Open access to air their complaints, open call-ins to radio stations, open discussions can pressure local authorities to adopt good practices of governance and transparency.

Salient Features of Community Radio

UNESCO defines community radio as radio run by, for and about the community. This broad principal distinguishes between state owned or public service broadcasting, commercial broadcasting and community radio [3].

Community radio is a non-profit station. This does not mean it cannot engage in revenue generating activities which tends to be vital for survival and sustainability. It simply means that it's not a revenue generating station like commercial radio stations.

The programming is all about the community, of direct relevance to them. The community needs to be specific.

Community radio has the community ownership concept. This empowers the community to use this radio for the community benefits like poverty eradication, reducing gender disparities, health, hygiene and many more topical issues.

Functions of Community Radio

Community radio dates back to more than half a century, to the miners Radios of Bolivia, which were instrumental in pressing better working conditions for tin miners. Poverty and social injustices were the stimulus for this initiative. This was the first recorded case of radio broadcasting being used by the sector of society to improve its socio-economic status [2].

Since 1980s, UNESCO has been actively promoting community radio as an agent for change and development. Its activities in many countries have always been supported by DANIDA (Danish Agency for Development Assistance), (UNESCO Handbook on Community Radio).

The principal functions of community radio are:

To reflect and promote local identity and character and culture by focusing principally on local content. Culture is how people of a community talk about their past and future. It is what they care about. Like life culture is a variable and it evolves constantly. Community culture is also artistic expression through local music, dance, poetry, theatre and storytelling. Culture is also language.

They encourage open dialogue and democratic process by providing independent platform for individual interaction and group discussion. Decisions of importance to the community are made. The core essence of any democratic process is the ability of people to be heard and to hear themselves. Community radio provides forum for these to happen e.g. Pamoja FM in Kibera, Kenya during 2007/2008, Post-Election violence. Also what is happening in the grassroots level is portrayed in community programming.

Community radio stations promote social change and development. In communities people have their own perceptions about situations whether individual or group. What is required at the end is change and development. This perception can only be changed and achieved through internal discussions to analyze specific problems, identify possible solutions and mobilize the appropriate action.

They create diversity of opinions and voices on air through openness to participation through from all sectors in all topics. Community radio tries to air objectively all sides of discussion without taking sides.

They promote good governance and civil society by playing community watchdog role that makes local authorities and politicians more conscious to their political responsibilities.

Some other functions of community radio include: sharing of information and information; giving voice to the voiceless and providing a social service to the community.

Kenyan Scenario

Community radio stations in Kenya have increased rapidly to nearly 20, including radio stations run by local universities. These community radio stations seek to empower the community through dissemination information.

Communication Commission of Kenya-CCK allows community broadcasting licensees to run commercials that are limited within the range of broadcast.

Vernacular FM stations, which are commonly mistaken to be community radio predominantly, broadcast from the city and some urban areas are commercial radios. The main difference from those broadcasting in Swahili and English is that they broadcast in vernacular. Examples of such vernacular language radio stations in Kenya include Inooro FM, Kameme FM, Kass FM, Murembe, Egesa FM, Ramogi FM etc.

The number of community radios in Kenya is few. They include Mang'elele Radio in Makueni, Radio Maendeleo in Rarienda, Koch FM in Korogocho, Pamoja FM in Kibera, and Ghetto FM in Pumwani etc.

People mistakenly confuse vernacular radio stations to be community radio stations. However, there is a big distinction between vernacular radio stations and community radio stations. Many people equate community radio to ethnic radio.

For any community radio to qualify in this genre, the ownership and control of the station must rest solely and without doubt with the community that it serves alone.

In Kenya competition from commercial radio stations continue to harbor lifeless feelings about community radio stations thereby feel that they can also serve community needs. They have not accepted, that special; character of community development is initiated by community radio rather than the antagonistic position they rake on it.

Community media exists to provide voice for the community they serve. As other radio stations they work within set of ethical and social framework. Their purpose is to protect the small audience they serve.

An example is Pamoja FM station which played a critical and major role in post-election violence. It is located in Kibera slums. It provided voice for different communities and worked to calm them down. Community radio represents the voice of the people and it is owned and managed by people from the community. The way they are owned and their way of doing things is different from commercial media.

Like just like commercial media, community media face vast problems including licensing fee which is equal to commercial stations and donor funding has tended to be scarce and less.

Cultural background of a certain geographical location and community is crucial during communication of information for development. Change in any society depends on the willingness of community members to renounce non-agents of change and adopt new ideas of life [4].

Therefore communities in Kenya through community radio station should be willing to adopt new ways and ideas of life.

Discussions on Air by Community Radio Stations

The contributions of community radio towards bringing peace after post elections violence in 2008 is evident though the following are some of the areas of discussions which fosters community development;

Information on farming and new agricultural innovations;

The role of community radio in the promotion of agriculture and helping people improve farming techniques hence changing their life. Programs on this area are held by different names in different stations depending on their local language;

This programme also initiates up to date reports on crop prices in the market, new crop varieties and demand for certain products on the market.

Health education

Where people are healthy, the community develops. Media has a responsibility to help people live healthy by providing necessary information on health issues and sector. These radio stations host doctors from various fields and they discuss issues on health. General talks about common illness or specific ones, their causes, signs and symptoms, cure and preventive measures are aired to the audience. These health topics should be of concern to the community. The fact that these stations have programmes on health; it's a sign that they rank health as important to their audience. As a factor to development, human health is vital.

Democracy and political awareness

Politics provides hottest news for the media and the public. Democracy and political awareness has been one of the top agendas of community radio. This is evident through Kenya's disputed elections of 2007/2008 where community radio stations played a key role in calming warring sides. Topics of political nature are introduced, platform is developed, audience start calling in while the host interjects and moderates the conversation to the end. Normally this program takes either thirty (30) minutes or more to one hour depending on the producer's priorities. Political personalities are also invited to the studios and given audience to ask the questions as they seek answers. Also they air national assembly and senate proceedings.

Economic empowerment

Community radio stations air useful information on small scale businesses and micro-credit schemes information. Poverty and lack of finance and income comes up always in this topic. Radio stations bring in experts who talk a lot on wide range of topics such as savings, how to start a small business among others. They also encourage testimonies of community members through phone-ins during the programme.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Though few, community radio stations in Kenya, there has been a great flow of information in the rural areas on topical issues like health, family values, democracy and human rights through their own programmes. Other programmes like relationships counseling, environment and health education have helped to raise public awareness and knowledge consumption.

Community radio stations promoted local artists and dramatists as well as the need to nurture community culture. There is a great relationship between mass media and society is acting as a vehicle for culture change and maintenance [5].

There must be a clear separation on commercial radio stations which airs their programmes on ethnic language and community radio stations.

The government should look unto the challenges facing community radio stations in Kenya such as government policies and legislation implementations to favor community radios in a position to favor community radios in a position to favor community development at large, lowering costs of radio installation equipment and machines by reducing taxes among others.

There must be a willingness to start up community radios in favor of local community development. They should have willingness to enforce code of conduct and practice within media practice and behavior of journalists.

There must be massive training of community journalists who will be willing to work on community radio stations covering and reporting local and community based issues that affect the community.

All these will bring to inclusive community development hence better lifestyles and living standards.

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