Chapter 7
Communicating Democracy through Participatory Radio in Nigeria: The Question of Political Economy

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ABSTRACT
Community media remains the only key tool that can facilitate grassroot citizens’ participation in nurturing and sustaining true democracy through creating and using information content that is driven by the needs of the communities for themselves and by themselves. By so doing, the citizens partake in determining their future through developing the community and educating their people in a manner and language that they can understand. Moreover, community media enables people from different socio-cultural backgrounds within a community, to share information and exchange ideas in a positive and productive manner. This dialogue among communities can be enriched by understanding how development issues affect them; discovering what others think in other communities; and seeing what other communities have achieved. In this light, participatory radio serves as a means of developing the grassroots emancipation that will enable them to articulate their needs in alignment with the cultural and social impulses of the communities they represent through means of technology, that is, community radio. The role of community radio is heightened by the realization that traditional or orthodox practice of the commercial/mainstream media has failed in achieving some of its basic and expected functions to the society such as serving as a true watchdog of the society, especially in a fledgling democratic system. Thus, this paper undertakes a case for sustainability of community radio in a developing society with a focus on both sides of the equation (production and distribution).

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INTRODUCTION

On the path of discussing participatory radio channels and democracy, one is often confronted with the question of whether having community radio channels would allow participatory contribution to the growth of democracy in Nigeria; or whether it is simply a matter of having specific participatory oriented programmes, within the existing radio channels in order to stimulate the interest of the communities. Along the path of discussing participatory radio channels and democracy, what we need ask is the following question: Does Nigeria need community radio channels to promote democracy or should emphasis simply be on specific participatory oriented programmes within the existing commercial radio stations in order to enable the communities to lend their voice to issues dealing with democracy in Nigeria? Within the context of the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission licensing policy, the broadcasting regulatory environment allows for pluralism as evidenced in the deregulatory policy introduced into the sector in 1992. Before 1992, the government had a monopoly of the telecommunications industry in Nigeria, however with global developments and changes in the industry, it became necessary for Nigeria to deregulate the communications industry in order to allow for private sector involvement in telecommunications, and as a result, the Nigeria communications commission (NCC) was established under Decree number 75 in 1992 (Adewumi & Adenuga, 2010). At the moment, there are 137 radio stations in Nigeria, whereby 44 are owned by the federal government, 41 are owned by the state government, 25 are owned by private entrepreneurs, while 27 are owned by higher institutions of learning (Okocha, 2015). Of concern to this paper, is the fact that there is no community radio in Nigeria at the moment, yet, any nation serious about fostering its democracy should emphasize the value of community radio (Ronning, 1994). If used correctly, community radio can bring peace and stability to a nation and contribute to successful governance. This is because of its capacity for public enlightenment, education and mobilization and social reconstruction (Okocha, 2015).

Community radio are stations operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community, however the community can be territorial or it can be a group of people with common interests but not living in one defined territory. Karikari (2000) notes that a community is an entity that is geographically or physically remote from centers of governmental and economic decision making and development; economically deprived or poor; culturally marginalised or alienated from dominant cultures; socially subordinated and discriminated against or persecuted; or politically victimized or disempowered. Community as an ideological stratum is conceived by *Ibid* (2000) as groups of people who identify themselves with particular social economic or political-ideological interests, views and orientations. The two denotive arms of community, as a concept, can realistically converge when a group or groups of people with shared ideologies, visions, interests, values, tastes reside in same geographical locales. Most often, people belonging to an ideological community reside across geographical dispersions with committed zeal to their shared values. This situation is common in the contemporary information technological era where individuals belonging to a social and ideological community do not know one another physically, but have continued to interact passionately, on social and interactive media, on issues bordering on their creeds and beliefs. During such interactions, members argue and counter-argue till they could find a point of confluence to their arguments. Community media is one form of such interactions that such communities use to interact and find a point of confluence to their arguments. Democracy and participation are at the core of community media making and therefore community media are owned and controlled by the local community in order to foster participation and