Community Radios and the Socio-Economic Development of the North-West Region of Cameroon: Case of the Donga Mantung Community Radio

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ABSTRACT

This article is aimed at evaluating the contributions of community radios to the development of regions. Qualitative and quantitative research designs were adopted added to secondary data (published, unpublished sources and the internet). The data derived was coded and analysed to come out with the following findings that Donga-Mantung community radio has significantly contributed to the local development of the division in the following ways. First, the community radio contributes to improvement in the agricultural activities of the local population. Second, the Donga Mantung community radio helps in promoting the culture of the people as well as the general sensitisation of the people. Third, the station has provided a forum for Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs) to reach out to the larger population by undertaking advertisements at very affordable fees. Fourth, the station contributes in sensitising the public on health issues focusing on AIDS prevention, vaccination and family planning.

KEYWORDS

Community Radio, Poverty Alleviation, Community Development, Livelihood, North West Region

INTRODUCTION

The revolution in ICTs has deep implication for economic and social development of a locality. It has pervaded every aspect of human life whether it is health, education, economics, governance and entertainment. According to Kofi Annan, if harnessed effectively, information and communication technologies have the potential to greatly improve our social, economic and cultural lives. It serves as an engine for the development in areas ranging from trade to telemedicine, and from education to environmental protection. They are tools with which to advance the cause of freedom and democracy.” (Kofi Annan, World Summit on the Information Society December 2003 cited in 2011) Dissemination, propagation and accessibility of these technologies are viewed as part of a country’s development strategy.

In increasingly in the present and globalised world, the population of the North-West Region of Cameroon particularly Donga Mantung Division should have access to a range of information to enable them to make informed choices concerning their livelihoods, management of resources, community health, and development so as to understand and influence the policies and decisions that impact them.

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Radio is the transmission of signals by modulation of electromagnetic waves with frequencies below those of visible light (Graf, 1974, Page 467) In Cameroon, the rise in the number of non-state radio stations was initially made possible by the signing in 1990 of the Freedom of Social Communication law (Republic of Cameroon, 1990b), and was further enabled by the decree on Private Audio-Visual Communication Enterprises in 2000 (Republic of Cameroon, 2000a). The possibility for individuals and communities to set up radio stations has given the population an opportunity to diversify its choice of programmes.

Community radio is a type of service that offers a model of broadcasting beyond commercial and public service whose broadcasting serves geographic communities and communities’ interest. The content of broadcasting is largely popular and relevant to a local/specific audience, but which may often be overlooked by commercial or mass media broadcasters. These radio stations are operated, owned, and driven by the communities they serve. They are usually not-for profit and provide a mechanism for facilitating individuals, groups, and communities to tell diverse stories, to share experiences, and in a media rich world to become active creators and contributors of media. By the core aims and objectives of this model of broadcasting, community radio stations often serve their listeners by offering a variety of content that is not necessarily provided by the larger commercial radio stations. For its proximate location to its clients, a Community Radio serves a local community of its interest. It is accessible to the community in terms of ownership, decision-making and programme output. In most cases, the community focuses on local concerns and issues. Unlike in the case of the mainstream media, rather than merely talking about the community, the people themselves make the programmes. This strengthens local culture with the recognition that this is their station; it becomes a forum for a wide diversity of local opinions and views.

Donga-Mantung is poor, rural and remote area within the North-West Region. The main industry is subsistence farming and less than half the population has had formal schooling. The roads are often impassable, and villages have no electricity, no phone lines, no television reception and, until 2006, not even a radio signal. Feeling cut off from the world and concerned about the spread of HIV, the local council began the Donga-Mantung Community Radio (DMCR) in 2006 to bring information and social improvements to its population (Rachel Stevenson, 2009).

Livelihood here refers to the wellbeing of the population of Donga Mantung. It refers to a situation where the local population is able to provide for its basic necessity of food, housing, education and the health of the population.

Despite the availability of the community radio, the community still lags behind in terms of improvement of livelihood of the population. This constitute the major problem that this work seeks to address.

The major question that this work seeks to answer is, what is the contribution of the Donga Mantung Community Radios to the development of the local population of this division of the North-West Region of Cameroon?

The main objective of this work is to investigate into the contributions made by the community radio to the improvement of the livelihood of the Donga Mantung community of the North-West region of Cameroon

**LOCATION OF THE NORTH-WEST REGION**

The North-West Region is found in the Western highlands of Cameroon. It lies between latitudes 5° 40’ and 7° to the North of the equator, and between longitudes 9°45 and 11°10’ to the East of the Meridian. It is bordered to the south-west by the South and West Regions, to the south by West Region, to the east by Adamawa Region, and to the north by the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The North-West Province was created in 1972 with five divisions: Bui, Donga-Mantung, Menchum, Mezam and Momo. From 2008, the province became the North West Region with seven
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