

**Community Media for
Development and Participation**
Experiences, Thoughts and Forethoughts

In honour of

Professor Alfred Esimatemi Opubor
Nigeria's First Professor of Mass Communication

Edited by

Ayobami Ojebode



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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Media Bias, Ethics, and Normative Limitations: Implications for Survival of Community Radio in Nigeria

Babatunde R. Ojebuyi

Introduction

One significant attraction of modern democracy as a system of government is public participation and recognition of the popular views of the masses for whom the government is meant. The major platform through which the masses articulate their opinions is provided by the mass media. Consequently, the mass media are a fundamentally vital institution of the world's democracies and social order. They constitute a significant part of the dominant means of ideological construction because what they produce is considered the representation and images of the social world. As events and issues occur daily, the mass media try to bring them to the consciousness of the public. They describe, explain and interpret events, and create the platforms for perception of how the world is, and why it operates as it is reported and described to operate (Norris, 1995; Vreese, 2005; Watson, 2007). The mass media serve as the voice of the voiceless majority; they serve as the 'eyes' and 'ears' of the citizens by helping them to keep surveillance on their environments. They gather and report events in the immediate and remote environments. The citizens see the media as a storehouse of information. For this reason, millions of people turn eagerly to the news media – the modern town crier and constructor of social reality (Eun-Ho, Kyung-Woo, and Afif, 2007) – to satisfy their appetite for up-to-date information about the events that

have significant impact on their lives and conducts.

Undoubtedly, the mass media are expected to be socially responsible, and ethically accountable to the masses. What the journalists report must be in the interest of the public by remaining perpetually ethical and uncompromising. Unfortunately, however, the highly commercialised and tensely competitive media context in Nigeria, which was triggered off especially by the neoliberal reforms of President Olusegun Obasanjo-led civilian administration between 1999 and 2007 (Olorunnisola, 2009) has made it almost impossible for the news media to remain unbiased, ethical, and genuinely responsible to the Nigerian masses. Opponents of the neoliberal policy (Ojebode, 2009; Moemeka, 2009) have contended that the reform favours the rich, but it is inimical to public service programs, because the policy is significantly profit-driven. The result of this phenomenon is that the mass media concentrate too much on the rich, urban cities where most of the advertisers are found. Consequently, the profit-driven media setting has compelled the media actors to neglect the poor, rural community dwellers, who constitute over 70 percent of the nation's population (Moemeka, 2009).

The seemingly most practicable solution to this trend, as suggested by the opponents of neoliberal policy, is enactment of enabling legislative policies that would catalyse and facilitate establishment of community radio stations across the country. But, how well can community radio stations fare in Nigeria given the fact that they are likely to be operated within similar normative setting that has already bedevilled the conventional media industry in general and radio broadcast in particular? This core subject and how it is affected by the intricate issues of media bias and ethics are what this paper attempts to critically examine. The paper first presents the background in respect of the struggle to institutionalise community radio in Nigeria, and the theoretical anchor for the study before moving on to examine the concepts of media bias and ethics, and how the two concepts interconnect within the normative imperatives that dictate the pattern of operations for the Nigerian journalists. Finally, the paper X-rays the predictive implications of these normative limitations for the survival of community radio in Nigeria, and suggests ways to ensure that the community radio stations – when they eventually come on board in Nigeria – truly belong to the community people.

Struggle for Establishment of Community Radio in Nigeria: The Journey So Far

A community radio station is a station owned, staffed and managed by and for members of a community. It is a non-profit station that engages in a development programme. Community radio stations are not-for-profit radio systems designed to operate on a small scale and to benefit the community people. Community broadcasting involves radio by and for the community. The community may be a physical community or a community of interest (Ojebode, 2009; Myers, 2011). The basic characteristics of community radio stations are enumerated by Myers (2011) as follows:

- (1) community radio should be run for social gain and community benefit, not for profit;
- (2) it should be owned by and accountable to the community that it seeks to serve; and
- (3) it should provide for participation by the community in programming and management.

In essence, *participation* is the central concept in community radio. The community people must not be denied access in terms of content development, production and management of their community radio station.

Radio broadcasting in Nigeria began in 1932 when the British colonialists built a monitoring station/listening post in Lagos. The project was designed in accordance with the structure of the British Corporation Empire Services, and was meant to test reception of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) overseas (Folarin, 1999). The station was an extension of the BBC. Consequently, its staff structure, operation and content were tailored after that of the BBC, while the primary audience and beneficiaries were the British residing in Nigeria at that time. But long after independence, even when radio stations had spread from Lagos to other parts of the country, radio broadcasting in Nigeria remained – and still remains – highly British (alien) and elitist (Ojebode and Adegbola, 2010) compromising the public interest and relegating the grassroots. Radio in Nigeria is yet to empower the citizens to participate actively in the democratic process; it is yet to embody the

voice and interest of the people.

Agitation for community radio in Nigeria, therefore, was spurred by the desire of the people – especially the grassroots that constitutes the majority of the nation's population (Moemeka, 2009) – to have a public radio system that truly belongs to them, serves them, and allows them to be actively involved in the democratic process. In other words, the overt lapses in radio broadcasting in Nigeria; the need for citizens' active participation in development issues; emergence of community radio broadcasting in other parts of the world; and the heterogeneous (multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multilingual) nature of Nigeria (Ojebode, 2009) prompted the struggle for establishment of community radio – an alternative radio system that would speak the people's language, discuss issues that directly affect the people, and empower the citizens to be part of the democratic governance. Although there had been some sorts of advocacy for community radio in Nigeria before the birth of the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition (Ojebode, 2010), the observable and co-ordinated agitation for establishment of community radio in the country began in 2003 when two international organisations (*the Panos Institute West Africa* – PIWA – and *the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters* – AMARC), in collaboration with *the Institute for Media and Society (IMS-Nigeria)*, inaugurated an "Initiative on Building Community Radio in Nigeria" (Akingbulu and Menkiti, 2010:9). This, interestingly, was several years after *Radio Sutatenza*, the first community radio in the developing world, was established in Colombia in 1947; and after the first community radio in Africa was established in Kenya, at Homa Bay on Lake Victoria, in 1982 (Myers, 2011).

After the pioneering initiative in 2003 by PIWA and AMARC (in partnership with IMS-Nigeria), direct community radio advocacy has experienced a remarkable velocity with the involvement of stakeholders such as *Nigeria Community Radio Coalition* through the *Institute for Media and Society (IMS)*, which has remained the arrowhead of community radio advocacy in Nigeria. For instance, in the same year, a group called *Steering Committee* was constituted. The committee had the mandate to evolve and assist in managing a policy that would herald the establishment of a viable community radio sub-sector in Nigeria. A *listerv* was created in 2004 to provide an on-line platform for interactions among community

radio advocates. After this came some awareness seminars in Ibadan, Enugu, Kaduna and Bauchi. Later in 2005, *IMS* also organised a national seminar on community radio and community radio advocacy (Ojebode and Ojebuyi, forthcoming).

While mapping the stages of advocacy for community radio in Nigeria, Ojebode (2009) categorises the struggles into five overlapping phases:

- (1) academic agitation;
- (2) birth of a coalition;
- (3) hopes on the horizon;
- (4) manpower development for the take-off; and
- (5) hopes dashed and denouement.

The phase of academic agitation was marked by pioneering efforts of researchers and scholars who presented strong recommendations for the establishment of community radio in Nigeria. The second phase – birth of coalition – witnessed series of advocacy movements and awareness seminars after the coming together of *Panos Institute West Africa* (PIWA) and *the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters* (AMARC) in partnership with *IMS* to launch an initiative as already stated above. The struggle for establishment of community radio in Nigeria got the attention of the media when, in 2005 *IMS*, on behalf of Community Radio Coalition, organised an editors' roundtable with twenty editors from print media organisations. Consequently, six journalists from print and broadcast media were sponsored on study visits to five West African nations that already had community radio stations. This is the phase of Hopes on the horizon. This stage catalysed the use of publications and the mass media generally by journalists, civil society groups, and international development agencies to propagate their support for the efforts of Community Radio Coalition. Series of publications and advocacy efforts seemed to get the attention of the Federal Government when the then Information Minister affirmed "that the Federal Government (through the Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation) has commenced the process of creating an enabling regime for the introduction of community radio in Nigeria" (Nweke, 2010:7). Beyond rhetoric, the federal government set up Policy Framework Panel to produce a policy framework covering issues of licensing, funding,

and monitoring of community radio. Headed by Professor Alfred Opubor (the late professor of communication), the panel submitted its reports to the Federal Ministry of Information and Communication in 2006 (Ojebode, 2009).

The fourth stage – manpower development for the takeoff – witnessed publication of training materials and intensive training of potential staff and managers of community radio. However, instead of giving licenses for the establishment of community radio stations, the Federal Government approved the establishment of eight campus radio stations: Instead of being discouraged, the Community Radio Coalition continued to work with the eight campus radio stations; continued to develop manpower for community radio, and agitate for the establishment of true community radio system. The final phase – hopes dashed and denouement – and, of course, the current stage of community radio advocacy, could be described as the phase of disappointment and surprise. All efforts and progress made so far by the coalition appear to have gone with the Obasanjo administration. The administrations of Musa Yar'Adua and Goodluck Jonathan seem to have developed cold feet towards the community radio project. The report of the panel led by Alfred Opubor was rumoured to be missing. The best that has happened so far, apart from emergence of campus radio stations, was a report early this year that *The National Orientation Agency* has, on behalf of the local governments in Nigeria, applied for about 800 community radio licences. Instead of being received with enthusiasms and commendation from the various stakeholders, the general reactions have been those of disappointment, frustration, condemnation and scepticism.

Unfortunately, as Ojebode (2009:215) puts it, “community radio advocacy in Nigeria has reached a denouement and it must return to the beginning.” However, all hopes may have not been lost as the people seem to have developed a strong awareness and immutable conviction about the relevance of community radio as a viable platform to engage in the democratic project, while the Community Radio Coalition, IMS and UNESCO continue to sensitise the public and develop human capacity, especially at the grassroots, in preparation for eventual emergence of true community radio system in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The Libertarian and the Social Responsibility theories are chosen for this paper because they belong to the normative theories of the press which state that the press in a given society is affected by the socio-political norms of the environment within which it operates (Folarin, 1998; Severin and Tankard, 2001). That is, media system in one social setting (country) is likely to be different from that of another because of the different prevailing social, cultural and political forces in such countries.

The libertarian theory emerged as a protest against the authoritarian theory of the press which gives all media control and ownership right to the ruling class and elite loyal to the state authorities. The Libertarian theory dwells on the principle of *rationalism* and holds that man is a rational being, who possesses the natural capability to make independent decisions that will advance his interest. Therefore, the press, under the libertarian regime, must be left alone to enjoy individual autonomy, be self-reliant, and constitute a free market place of diverse opinions, where government ceases to be the chief media umpire, and the court serves as the neutral arbiter (Baran and Davis, 2009; Day, 2006; Severin and Tankard, 2001). The press is to act as the watchdog by checking the activities of government. Among other functions, the press provides public enlightenment; serves the political and economic systems; safeguards civil liberty; provides entertainment; and makes profits to stay afloat in the market. The media ownership is open to everybody or those that can afford to establish a media organisation (Folarin, 1998). The libertarian theory is seen as a rebellion against the weaknesses of the authoritarian theory of the press, and in spite of the freedom it offers the public to own and access the media, the theory also has its inherent inadequacies. For instance, the libertarian theory has been criticised for being extremely optimistic about media's ability to be responsible, and individuals' ability to take sound decisions and unbiased judgement (ethics and rationality); it neglects the imperativeness of reasonable control of media; and ignores the dilemmas and danger posed by conflicting freedoms especially that of free press versus personal privacy. In fact, the freedom that the theory presumably presents has been questioned given the realities of the threats posed by excessive

competition in the media market; extreme reliance on advertising (market journalism and profit making); conflicting ownership interests and controls (Watson, 2003; Baran and Davis, 2009). The intrinsic weaknesses of the libertarian theory expectedly necessitated the emergence of another normative theory – the social responsibility theory.

The social responsibility theory emerged as a response to the abuse of freedom and reckless competition. The press became more commercially inclined, and the power to own the media was concentrated in the hands of a few rich with selfish interests. Consequently, access to the press by the public became increasingly limited and open criticism or alternative opinions became compromised – the media became grossly irresponsible.

The social responsibility theory was first articulated in 1947 in the United State of America as contained in the Hutchins Commission's Reports (Day, 2006). The Commission enunciated a Free and Responsible Press, whose primary duties are to service, promote and preserve democracy through provision of relevant information and by responding to the need of the masses. As contained in the basic tenets of the social responsibility theory, the press is expected to perform some fundamental functions and exhibit some traits:

- (1) the media are responsible to society, and media ownership is a public trust;
- (2) news media should be truthful, accurate, fair, objective and relevant;
- (3) the media should be free, but self-regulated;
- (4) the media should adhere to the agreed codes of ethic and professional conducts as stipulated by the relevant professional bodies or government agencies; and
- (5) occasionally, government may need to intervene to protect public interest (McQuail, 2007).

In summary, the social responsibility theory provides that the news media should be as free as possible and at the same time journalists should be socially responsible by conscientiously performing their duties of “reporting a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day’s event in a context that gives them meaning” (Day, 2006:39).

The implication of the counter-libertarian (authoritarian tendency) as espoused in (5) above is that the journalists should be sensitised to the fact that government, from time to time, may exercise some control and insert itself in order to correct errant media especially when the principle of self-righting, as articulated by libertarianism, is not observed. In Nigeria, for example, the NBC (National Broadcasting Commission) and the NPC (National Press Council) are the regulating agencies established by the Federal Government to issue licences and to regulate the operations of the broadcast programming and print-media publications respectively. The NBC in Nigeria is similar to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in the United States of America. The regulatory agencies, apart from issuing licenses, are to ensure that the media serve the public interest by respecting diversity and providing “(locally) relevant information, balance and fairness on controversial and political matters” (McQuail, 2007:179).

Media Bias: The Inevitable Reality

Media bias, a phenomenon that has attracted attention of various scholars (e.g. Burke, 1983; Peh and Melkote, 1991; Al-Ahram and Le Monde, 1989; D’Alessio and Allen, 2000; Whitaker and Dyer, 2000; Sutter, 2002; Martin, 2005; Levasseur, 2008; Mathews, 2009), is the term used to describe a situation where the media show an unjustifiable favouritism in their news contents. In such cases, the media present the audience with a partial and an inaccurate, unfair picture of the social reality.

According to D’Alessio and Allen (2000), there seems not to be a major theory about media bias but three types of approaches to its explanation exist. The first approach has to do with the issue of gatekeeping. This explains that journalists select few items from a pool of potential stories, and by extension, deselect those stories that will never get to the mass audience. This type of bias is termed *gatekeeping bias*. This bias is located in the domain of the levels analysis (McManus, 1995; Shoemaker *et al* 2001; Barzinlai-Nahon, 2008) as first demonstrated in David Manning White’s “Mr Gate” study (Watson, 2003; Sang, 2008). The second type is called *coverage bias*. This approach attempts to describe media bias by measuring the physical amount of coverage *either side of* an issue gets from the media. In newspapers and newsmagazines, coverage

bias is usually measured in column inches, through photographs and headlines, whereas in television and radio reporting, the amount of airtime given to each side of the story is measured.

The third approach is described as *statement bias*. This occurs when journalists interject their own opinions, judgement or sentiments into the content of the coverage of an issue. However, it is not just the presence of these personal opinions and sentiments that makes a story to be biased. When such personal opinions come in equal proportions on both sides of an issue being reported, the report is described as neutral. But when such opinions tilt to one side, then the story is described as biased. An objective story is the one that does not contain, in whatever proportion, traces of personal opinions and judgement. According to D'Alessio and Allen, all the three categories of media bias are structural because they have to do with the structure of the media content.

On the other hand, Levasseur (2008) identifies two taxonomies that broadly underpin the concept of media bias. These are *partisan bias* and *structural bias*. The first type – partisan bias – involves media reports that are tilted in favour of a particular political party. Media news that manifests a partisan bias favourably projects one political party at the expense of other political parties. So, in political reporting, when people accuse the media of biased reporting, they are making reference to partisan bias. The second type of media bias – structural bias – springs from certain frameworks (e.g. customs, reporting routines, and commercial pressures) that operate within the news industry. Within any given media organisation, journalists always face certain pressures and incentives that dictate what and how they report. For instance, the journalists may be compelled by advertisers or politicians to write certain stories or tilt the story in certain direction. Incentives may come in the form of free launch, free trips, gifts of money, and property. When reporters put a certain slant on their stories to adhere to these industry pressures and incentives, their stories reflect the industry's structural bias. The media's structural bias also favours negative news and conflicts. Naturally, negative information and conflicts attract human attention (Folarin, 1998; Uphuofu-Biri, 2006; Anaeto, Solo-Anaeto and Tejumaiye, 2009). Therefore, the media, in their attempt to satisfy their audience, always have bias for stories that portray individuals negatively and in a state of

conflict at the expense of news that have to do with development and social issues.

The concept of bias is highly interwoven with media gatekeeping and newsworthiness decisions. This is because the journalists who determine what is newsworthy among the contending issues of almost equal status and importance are always guided by some prescribed institutional and professional criteria. These criteria always exert great influence on the editorial decisions of the journalists. This is where and why media bias creeps into the news reporting function of the media (D'Alessio and Allen, 2000). From the perspective of political economy, the news media are directly or indirectly influenced by the social forces that frequently are the manifestations of dominant economic power. According to Martin (2005), media ownership, for example, is always a powerful factor that exerts great influence on the content of the news. This happens directly through promulgation of statute or indirectly through institutionalisation of certain ideological environment that shapes how the journalists present their reports. Martin (2005:2) further asserts that "the for-profit orientation of media corporations also tends to result in a situation where the media try to aid their supporters – namely their advertisers and the wider business community".

The foregoing scenario suggests that as long as news media must strive to survive in the competitive environment – as the case in Nigeria's neoliberal economy – the media actors will always have to contend with the inevitable reality that certain criteria will perpetually shape the structure of media gatekeeping and agenda setting business. Consequently, reporting unbiased, objective news by news medium may be impracticable as editors would always be compelled to tilt in favour of certain predominant forces at the expense of the social responsibility functions of the mass media. However, with the notion of marketplace of ideas and media pluralism, where each medium comes with its own biases, the whole scenario is balanced out by counter-biases. This provides the public with the opportunity to access and balance the diverse versions of the story. At the level of community radio, pattern of biased coverage of issues is also likely to manifest, especially when the monetary resources to run the community radio come from influential individuals, desperate politicians or advertisers rather than from the community

people. But with more than one community radio in proximate communities all the radio stations could not exhibit the same level of bias on the same issue. Therefore, there would be multiplicity of sources from which the listeners can find the truth.

Ethical Conducts among Journalists: Searching for Elusive Pearl?

Another significant variable in the news media business is the issue of ethics. According to Foreman (2010:17), “ethics is a set of moral principles, a code – often unwritten – that guides a person’s conduct”. Michael Josephson cited by Foreman (2010) identifies two aspects of ethics: First, ethics involves the ability to discern right from wrong, good from evil, and propriety from impropriety. Second, ethics entails the readiness to do what is right, good and proper. In summary, ethics is the pursuit of good when evil is a strong alternative; it is coping with the challenge of doing the right thing even when that will force one to pay some price or make some sacrifice.

Media ethics is the moral principles that guide the media professionals in the discharge of their duties as agents of truths, who are expected to give accurate, objective, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day’s events in a manner that gives meaning to these events. Scholars have justified the emergence of media ethics. One of them, Coleman (2009:1), argues that “the need for media ethics rises as news reporting becomes driven more and more by the free market rather than the truth”. What Coleman means here is that the libertarian media system that gives freedom in terms of ownership and operation has also intensified competition. The implication of this is that media organisation must make profit to stay in the market, and unless there is a set of code of ethics to curb excesses, journalists may continue to compromise their responsibilities by promoting interest of the advertisers at the expense of the citizens’ right to know the truth.

Though ethics explain the standard for acceptable conducts, there is hardly a universally acknowledged code of ethics especially for electronic media journalists. What is accepted as professional code of conduct varies from one normative context and one media organisation to another. Even within an electronic media setting, code of ethics may vary from

one department to another (Albarran, 2010). Journalists in particular, who directly process the primary product that the media organisation sells to the audience (Foreman, 2010), must always ensure as much as possible that their personal moral beliefs do not conflict with the organisational code of ethics. But when such conflict arises, it is advisable that the journalists apply the utilitarian ethical rule by making a decision that benefits the majority.

It is professionally desirable that journalists practise sound ethics because, like other professions such as medicine, law, business and engineering, conducts of journalists have consequences for the mass audience to whom they are accountable. Journalists have some moral duties they must perform. Christians, Rotzoll, Fickler, McKee, and Woods cited by Albarran (2010) identify five basic ethical duties of news media employees at all levels. These are summarised as:

- (a) duty to self in terms of objectivity, individual integrity, and conscience;
- (b) duty to the audience by considering how their moral decisions will affect their audience;
- (c) duty to employer or organisation;
- (d) duty to professional colleagues, and
- (e) duty to society by carefully considering the issues of individual rights and confidentiality while reporting news.

Also, Foreman (2010) identifies two core incentives for ethical behaviour among journalists. He categorises these incentives as *moral* and *practical*.

The moral incentive stipulates that journalists should be ethical because they, like other human beings, love to see themselves as decent and honest. They love to feel the satisfaction and psychic reward that they have tried to do what is morally acceptable within the social order. For this reason, ethical journalists would not do what is capable of bringing disrepute to their persons.

The practical incentive has to do with the ethical responsibility imposed on the journalists by the institutional framework. Journalists are expected to promote their organisation's credibility and public acceptability, which in turn mean commercial gains for the organisation. Journalists have a commodity to sell, and this is news. Therefore, an

ethical journalist will always strive to write credible stories that can promote the image of his organisation, while an unethical journalist may bring disrepute to the corporate image of his media organisation through biased stories.

Each time a journalist has to make news decisions, he is likely to be guided by either of the two broad ideological perspectives. The first is the deontological (also known as absolutism, rule-based or duty-based) perspective, which prescribes that the action of a moral agent would be considered ethical when such action is based on certain universal moral principles irrespective of the consequences of the action. The second is the teleological (also described as consequentialism, utilitarianism, ends-based or consequence-based) perspective, which is anchored on the belief that when the action of a moral agent produces the best consequences, such action is ethical irrespective of the means through which the end is achieved. None of the two perspectives is absolutely ideal. While the deontological perspective has been criticised for being too uncompromising for the realities of the modern society, the teleological perspective has been censured for its heavy reliance on unknown results, predictive powers of the moral agent, and neglect of the individuals or small groups (Day, 2006).

Really, trying to be ethical always, especially in complex settings such as Nigeria where journalists must contend with conflicting forces that routinely influence their editorial decisions and procedure, may be a herculean task. To cope with the challenge of ethical dilemma, scholars like Foreman (2010:22; 76-77), have counselled that moral agents (journalists) should exercise some measure of caution and learn how to blend both deontological and teleological orientations when they are faced with the knotty task of making ethical decisions.

Therefore, the seeming elusiveness of a universally ideal ethical guide as a result of fundamental contextual peculiarities has justified the adoption of Aristotle's golden means, which emphasises that moral agents (journalists) should be concerned more about acquisition of virtues (good character) than rigid adherence to standards and principles for assessment of moral decision making, any time they are confronted with the moral dilemma that journalism usually presents.

The thrust of the normative theories of the press is that the prevalent

socio-political, economic and cultural manifestations of a given society shape the operations of its news media. Although journalism practice across the world is governed by the universal characteristics and common principle of truthful and accurate reporting, there are yet other attributes of journalists that are context-bound (Ebo, 1994). This is one of the circumstances that provoke the question of ethical dilemma – a situation where the moral agent faces conflicting ethical values. The suggested alternative for the journalists is to be guided by the prevailing context and circumstances while making moral decisions instead of a rigid adherence to a particular ethical orientation at all times.

Normative Limitations: The Nigerian Examples

The media terrain in the contemporary Nigerian communication industry is a hybrid of the libertarian and Social responsibility theories of the press with some traces of authoritarianism. The deregulation of the broadcast industry in 1992 aimed at liberalising the industry and removing government monopoly in order to allow private ownership of broadcast media. The policy witnessed the establishment of private broadcast media houses in Nigeria. With emergence of private and government-owned broadcast media in the country, the public started to enjoy relative access to the media. Not only this, media pluralism that came with the deregulation policy provided alternatives for the citizens in terms of news and information sources. One may situate this trend in the libertarian press theory. Again, in order to have socially responsible media, government established some regulating agencies. The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) is an example. Some of the functions of the NBC include:

- (1) advising the Federal Government on policy implementation on broadcasting;
- (2) processing and recommending broadcasting license applications to the President through the information Minister;
- (3) establishing an industry code and setting standards;
- (4) addressing public complaints;
- (5) upholding equity and fairness; promoting indigenous cultures and community life; and

including section 39(2) of Nigeria's Constitution – and the broadcasting code restrict the Commission from effectively performing its cardinal functions of serving the public interest, acting as a regulator of the broadcast industry, and assisting to fortify the democratic institution through citizens' participation. Clause 7 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa requires that the procedure for appointing members of a regulatory body should be transparent, free from politicians' interference, and receive input of civil society. In what looks like a sharp violation of the provision of this Clause, members of the NBC are all appointed by the president on the recommendation of the minister of information. The implication of this phenomenon is that the NBC is given limited regulatory independence and is subjected to undue control of the Ministry of Information and the Presidency, who must give the final approval for issuance of broadcast licences (Akinfeleye, 2010; Akingbulu and Bussiek). With this undemocratic arrangement, one may not be wrong to conclude that the deregulation policy as professed by the Federal Government is nothing but a mere political charade.

In Nigeria, public service broadcasting is a mere lip-service. The Nigerian broadcast industry lacks the basic characteristics of public service broadcasting such as geographical universality of service; provision for minority audiences; diversity of programmes; and an editorial independence (Ojebode, 2009). Instead, what we have is broadcasting system whose editorial independence has been compromised by proprietors' deep romance with those people holding political and economic power. Editors must always do the biddings of their advertisers and political benefactors at the expense of the mass audience. Rural community people and grassroots issues are completely neglected or massively marginalised by the editors. Development issues that really affect the grassroots are not given priority by the elitist media.

The Nigerian journalists always face the delicate task of striking a balance between ethical obligations (socially responsible journalism) and the normative realities in their work environment. Truth is sacred and absolute, and it must be reported. Yet, reporting the absolute truth will naturally have some consequences for both the journalists and the audience. When reporting, the truth is likely to adversely affect the

economic interest of a media house, especially when news actors involved in the story are powerful politicians or influential benefactors, the mass audience are likely to be denied of getting the truth. In Nigeria, there has been a hot battle between public service and profit-making, but public service is losing the war. A study by Ojebode (2009: 67) clearly proves this: twelve of the thirteen broadcasting professionals interviewed "believed that profit-making and public service often conflict, and that in the conflict, the latter is often the loser." Public broadcast stations, which rely heavily on subventions from the government to survive, have been reduced to ordinary mouthpiece of, and propaganda tool for, the government of the day while private stations must always protect the political constituents of their proprietors and the economic interest of the advertisers if they want to remain perpetually in the market.

Implications for Survival of Community Radio in Nigeria

In terms of speed and flexibility in news coverage, radio is the fastest medium. No other news media can compete with radio when it comes to covering events of tremendous national or global significance that must be disseminated instantly to a large, scattered, heterogeneous audience (Sambe, 2005) and cause them to act spontaneously. These and other attributes of radio make the medium to be a relevant tool of mass mobilisation in a democratic setting like Nigeria. But when the community people, who really constitute the majority of the entire Nigerian population, have been neglected by the conventional radio broadcast system, an alternative radio broadcasting that will cater for the people and their peculiarities is imperative. Community radio is the alternative. Many African countries (for example Liberia, Mali, Ghana, Senegal, Burkina Faso, South Africa, Benin and Niger) recognise the importance of community radio, and have formulated policies in support of community radio. However, in spite of frequent agitations by various stakeholders (e.g. *the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition (NCRC)*, *the Institute for Media and Society (IMS)*, *Media Rights Agenda (MRA)* and *the International Press Centre*) for promulgation of policies and issuance of licences for establishment of community radio, government is yet to come up with a definite policy that supports the establishment of community radio. The best we have heard is the pronouncement by

President Goodluck Jonathan, on Tuesday (19 October, 2010), empowering the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) to approve licences for the establishment of community radio stations in the country, without any recourse to the Presidency. Unfortunately, several months after the President's pronouncement, the NBC is yet to license a single community radio station in Nigeria.

Even when Government is ready to give the licenses, the potential community radio stations are to operate within the same neoliberal setting and framework as the conventional radio stations. With the social, political and economic realities already discussed in the foregoing sections, it is hardly possible for the Nigerian broadcast media to be socially responsible.

Really, the normative challenges that may threaten the survival of community radio in Nigeria are numerous. One, there is no genuine public service radio in Nigeria yet, as the public-owned radio stations are still in the firm grips of the ruling class. Two, the private radio stations are controlled by the capitalist who are always government loyalists. Three, majority of the community people, who are expected to be the sole owners and audience of community radio, are grossly poor and massively illiterate; they may not be able to independently provide the money and other technical services to get the licenses and run the stations.

The politicians are always laying ambush to exploit any available opportunity to propagate their selfish agenda. The emergence of community radio may give them the much anticipated opportunity to silence the people. What they need to do is just to provide the money and other assistance for their community people, who want community radio, but too poor to get the license, or too illiterate to independently run the station. Naturally, money always comes with strings attached to it – the politicians that provides monetary assistance to a community radio station would definitely come back to demand for some difficult and dangerous favours from the radio station. The universal definition of community radio is anchored on the philosophy of popular ownership, community participation, and non-profit orientation (*The Stakeholders Charter, 2005*). But when the community people have to rely on few politicians or capitalists for assistance, because the community cannot raise funds independently to obtain the licenses and run the station, the notion of popular ownership is defeated. Again, if the community people

decide to be financially independent, the most sustainable means of generating funds is probably through placement of commercials in the broadcasts. This again threatens the notion of non-profit orientation. This is where the questions of social responsibility, ethical behaviour and bias set in. Community radio stations can hardly be socially responsible when bulk of the funds to manage them comes from the politicians. At the same time, it may be difficult for the stations to always objectively report the truth and basic issues that affect the community people when the stations must survive on proceeds from commercials. On either side, the community radio stations may remain tools of propaganda for the sponsoring politicians/capitalists, or tilt the truth to favour the advertisers at the expense of the community people!

Conclusion and Recommendations

As journalists endeavour to be ethical in the discharge of their duties, they also have to contend with some local socio-economic realities that may largely shape the structure of their news coverage and reporting. Day (2006: 21) contends that "with so many diverse forces bombarding us with ethical cues, it is inevitable that conflicts between competing values will emerge". Bias and ethics, therefore, are two inverse forces that largely shape the structure of media content. The extent to which a media organisation adheres to the general ethical standard mostly determines the structure of its news content. A news organisation with a high ethical inclination is expected to produce news reports whose contents reflect objectivity, whereas a media outfit with low ethical adherence has high proclivity to feed its mass audience with biased reports. For example, as Levasseur (2008) observes, media corporations that place greater emphasis on profit motive will have their news coverage tilted in favour of the advertisers' interests while media organisations that are owned and almost absolutely financed by the ruling political parties are likely to have strong bias for the ruling parties, at the expense of non-partisan, objective news standpoints.

Community radio is expected to be the real voice of the people in a true democracy. It is, therefore, suggested that for community radio stations in Nigeria to maintain true "community-ness" when they eventually come up, sources of funding them should be independent of

politicians and less dependent on commercials. As the case in other developing nations (Myers, 2011) with viable community radio system (for example, Liberia, DR Congo, Sierra Leone, Thailand, Mali, Kenya, Nepal and South Africa), stakeholders and community people can approach external donors who do not have any ulterior interest in the political affairs of the receiving communities. Examples of these donors are UNICEF, UNESCO, USAID, and FAO. Other means of funding the community radio stations when they eventually come are patronage (by the community people to place adverts at low costs), voluntary contributions by the community people, and re-ploughing of the profits generated by the radio station back to the station.

Indeed, government should be sincere enough to come up with plausible policies and give community radio licenses (at an affordable fee) to the willing communities. Nigerian government seems to be reluctant to issue licenses for the establishment of community radio stations perhaps because of the fear that community radio could be “a focus for ethnic unrest in certain states” (Myers, 2011:15) and empower the masses to be critical of government. However, it is only when Nigeria has a functioning and truly autonomous community radio system that the nation can become a true democratic society. Ojebuyi's (2010: 200) position captures this as he posits that:

... the phenomenon in Nigeria, where the government is apparently averse to issuing licences for community radio broadcasting, sketches a contradictory and counter-productive scenario – especially with the country's return to democracy in 1999. When a nation that claims to practise democracy denies the rural majority the opportunity of legitimate, free expression and participation, the authenticity of such a brand of democracy becomes explicitly questionable.

The world is watching Nigeria as a major force in Africa. The extent to which the government is able to allow the Nigerian citizens to participate in the affairs that affect their lives determines how far the nation can survive as a collective entity where no segment of the country feels marginalised or suppressed. Community radio is the answer!

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