

Community Radio Advocacy in Democratic Nigeria: Lessons for Theory and Practice

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Abstract

This article describes the challenges of working toward an enabling policy and legal environment for community radio in Nigeria. Given the acute development problems it faced and years of autocracy, expectations were that when Nigeria became a democracy, it would immediately deploy all tools, including community radio, to enhance development and participation. Theorists suggest that democracy should be accompanied by enlarged opportunities for expression occasioned by, among others, the removal of the restraints imposed on media ownership by autocrats. But ten years into democracy, Nigeria has yet to allow the establishment of community radio stations. The article identifies five phases of the advocacy for community radio and how it has reached a deadlock. Enlarging the opportunities for expression, in this case through licensing community radio stations, has proved to be as difficult in Nigeria during democracy as it was in the military period. This has lessons and challenges for theory and advocacy.

Keywords: advocacy, African democracy, community media, community radio advocacy, democracy, Institute for Media and Society, Nigeria, Nigeria Community Radio Coalition, press concepts, radio in Nigeria.

Introduction

The concept of radio broadcasting in Nigeria is completely at variance with the idea of community. Radio broadcasting started as an initiative of the colonial government in 1932, and for sixty years remained solely in the hands of government. Radio stations disseminated government messages to the audience and not much more: they carried no messages from the audience to the government and, save for request programs and a few other such programs, they carried no

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messages from one segment of the audience to another. For years, it appeared as if Nigerians expected no more from radio than it being the government mouthpiece. This dynamic has been even more so since Nigeria has witnessed many more years of military rule than democracy (Olorunnisola, 1997; Okusan, 2005).

Nigeria became a democracy again in 1999 and witnessed the first successful civilian-to-civilian transition in 2007. For once, it appears democracy has come to stay in Nigeria. Democracy is more than civil rule and Nigerians seem to understand that. For instance, with democracy came the demand for the expansion of the public sphere. Part of this demand came in the form of advocacy for community radio stations. Normative democratic theories lead us to expect a liberal regime of licensing coming with democracy. Not only this, but the survival of democracy depends on participation and radio has been described as a media that can accentuate participation. Rønning (1994, p. 16) argues:

Potentially radio is a very democratic medium which when used in a decentralized manner may give local people and communities an opportunity to express their grievances in representative discussions. This however presupposes the establishment of decentralized structures and local and community radio stations as well as radio stations representing the views of organizations in civil society such as trade unions.

Therefore, Rønning (1994) seems to suggest, a nation that is serious about nurturing its democracy should accord importance to community radio, especially in Africa. How then has the quest for community radio lasted in Nigeria for ten years into democracy?

To answer the question, we examine the progress made in community radio advocacy in Nigeria. We examine the state of radio broadcasting in Nigeria, briefly sum up what democracy theorists lead us to expect about advocacy for an expanded public sphere in a democracy, chronicle the advocacy for community radio in Nigeria, and draw lessons for democracy theory and advocacy practice.

Radio in Nigeria

In Nigeria, as well as in most other African countries, radio broadcasting was the initiative of colonial governments. In December 1932, radio broadcasting began in what is now Nigeria when a repeater station of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was installed in Lagos, primarily to keep the expatriates abreast of events in Britain. Commenting on radio in colonial Africa, Olorunnisola (1997) noted that the content of the programs had no direct relevance to the basic needs and lifestyles of the indigenous audiences, because the re-broadcasts were meant to fulfill the listening needs of the colonial masters. As a medium imported to cater solely to the needs of the elite, radio was developed

into a popular medium only when the colonialists “recognized that a full-fledged service would be useful in rallying the protectorates together for administrative efficiency . . . radio [thus] became a low cost means of governance” (p. 244).

In spite of the disparity between their hopes, needs, and lifestyles and what radio offered, Nigerians embraced radio so overwhelmingly that the Radio Distribution Services (RDS), as it was then known, ran out of loudspeakers within one year. Though the RDS became independent of the BBC and was named the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS) in 1951 (later the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation [NBC] in 1957), control was still in the hands of the colonial government and many workers in the station were primarily BBC staff rather than primarily NBC staff. Even after independence, many stations retained these BBC staff as technical and administrative consultants (Duyile, 1979; Olorunnisola, 1997; Ojebode & Adegbola, 2007).

Broadcasting was exclusively a federal government preserve until 1954 when a new colonial constitution was passed. The law allowed the regions to own and run radio stations, and within three years, each of the three regions that made up Nigeria had its radio station. The number of regions (and, later, states) grew and so did the number of radio stations. But the growth was restricted: private or community ownership of radio was not allowed (Duyile, 1979).

Though the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Section 36, 2) made express provision for the establishment of private radio stations, successive governments refused to put this provision into effect. It was in August 1992 that the then military government deregulated the airwaves by allowing private entrepreneurs to establish commercial radio (and television) stations. As of 2008, according to information on the Web site of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC, 2008), the regulatory body in the Nigerian broadcast sector, there are 101 radio stations in Nigeria. Eighty-four of these are owned by government, 16 by private entrepreneurs, and 1 by a university. There is no station that can be regarded as a community radio station in Nigeria.

The stations strive to serve their immediate audiences. Most state radio stations, located in the capitals, seek to meet the information needs of those living in the states (Ojebode, 2007). In most states of Nigeria, there are several ethnic and linguistic groups. Nigeria itself has 389 ethnic groups (Otite, 2000). This poses additional responsibility to the stations, as news has to be read in different languages and some programs designed in the different languages. For instance, on the Delta State Broadcasting Services (DBS), news is read in six indigenous languages; in Benue State Radio (Radio Benue), it is read in three. There are request programs in six languages on DBS. And there are agricultural programs in Tiv and Idoma on Radio Benue (Ojebode & Adegbola, 2007).

Commendable as the above might be, the situation raises a number of issues. It has not been possible for the radio stations located in state capitals in many

states to reach every group in the state. In a study among small ethnic minorities in Nigeria, Ojebode (2007) discovered that many members of these ethnic groups had not heard their languages spoken on radio, even though their state owns radio stations. This is because within the motley collections of minority groups that make up a state, the bigger groups combine political and numerical dominance to control the radio stations and other government establishments.

Second, even when the language of a group is spoken on radio in these multilingual states, it is for a limited time period in the programming. Members of that group will have to endure what to them is noise when it is time for radio to speak the language of another group. This happens even in fairly homogenous states such as Oyo in the southwest. Located in Ibadan, capital of Oyo State, a predominantly Yoruba-speaking state, the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) serves non-Yoruba-speaking neighboring states such as Edo and Kogi. News and programs are presented in Yoruba as well as in other languages such as Edo and Igala. Each time any of these languages are employed, speakers of other languages have to accept their exclusion (Ojebode, 2007; Ojebode & Adegbola, 2007).

Third, many programs—especially but not only technical programs and news—are presented in English. As Ojebode and Adegbola (2007) observe, some of these programs do not have indigenous language versions. As an example, they noted that the only environmental education program on Radio Benue was in English, meaning that left to Radio Benue alone, about 75 percent of Benue indigenes would have no access to environmental education, for only about 25 percent of Nigerians speak English (Wolf, 2001). Not only this, but the use of technical jargons in some of these programs—especially health and environmental education programs—well excludes another good portion of the 25 percent that speak English (see Ojebode & Adegbola, 2007).

Not only the languages but also the identity, needs, and hopes of ethnic minorities are not properly protected by radio in Nigeria. Most communities just do not feel radio cares about them. According to Ojebode (2007), members of minority ethnic groups were sad that their own cultural activities and issues are hardly ever reported by radio. In a content analysis of radio news, Ojebode and Adegbola (2007) found that 64.1 percent of news from government-owned stations was about government and government officials. And whereas 88 percent of news about government was positive, most news about the communities was negative.

In spite of these incongruities, radio still remains central to the life and affairs of the average Nigerian. With electricity power supply hitting an abysmally low level in the past year and with the adult literacy rate at 67 percent (IRA, 2007), access to television and print media is not available to most Nigerians. Community radio is therefore a fundamental human requirement in Nigeria.

What Democracy Theorists Lead Us to Expect

Among theorists and scholars, there are differing descriptions of what democracy is or what it should entail. As Kornberg and Clarke (1994) point out, much of the disagreement is traceable to the internal tension between the three theoretical building blocks of modern-day democracy: the norms of Athenian democracy that emphasize popular sovereignty; the principles of classical liberalism that emphasize the strength of the market and the rights and privileges of the individual; and the criteria set by participatory theorists that accord centrality to community and group participation.

In more specific terms, scholars (for instance, Habermas, 1984, 1995; Jacka, 2003; Post, 2005; Karppinen, 2007) disagree on whether a common will is possible or even desirable, on whether the apparatus of the state should be deployed to leverage disadvantaged groups in a democracy, and on how to balance state interest with individual rights and privileges. Habermas (1984, 1995) theorized that a common will was possible in a democracy notwithstanding the diversity that might characterize the citizenry or the incompatibility of the goals of the individual and the group. But Jacka (2003) and Karppinen (2007, p. 496) disagreed with that position, describing it as an underestimation of the “depth of societal pluralism and the fundamental nature of value conflicts.” Post (2005, p. 145) considers it “implausible to claim that there can exist a complete identity between the particular wills of individual citizens and the general will.” According to him, what matters more is the individual’s recognition in the general will of their own potential authorship. And whereas Habermas (1984) assigns little or no space for market and state manipulations, Jacka (2003) and Karppinen (2007) stress the need for state intervention and politicking decidedly aimed at leveraging subordinated groups.

But there are also areas of agreement. Features of democracy that cut across several theoretical positions and opinions on democracy include self-determination, periodic elections, citizens’ engagement, and ongoing deliberations facilitated by an expanding access to means of expression (Habermas, 1995; Jacka, 2003; Post, 2005; Olorunnisola, 2006; Karppinen, 2007). However, what each of these means in specific terms and differing contexts remains a subject of disagreement.

We are concerned here with the last on the foregoing list of features. Expanding access to the means of expression is the least common denominator for democracies (Post, 2005; Olorunnisola, 2006). We thus expected that in Nigeria, access to radio by communities—not as receivers of information but as active message makers and station owners—would easily expand with the coming of democracy in 1999. Advocacy for community radio should indeed be fruitful. Not only theorists but also discussants of press concepts lead us to hold this expectation.

Among such discussants, Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956), Folarin (2002), and Olorunnisola (2002, 2006) argue that when a nation transitions from autocracy to democracy (as Nigeria did in 1999), restriction on media ownership should slacken, along with government control of the market. If media transition does not accompany political transition, the result is, in Olorunnisola's (2006, p. 12) words, "theoretically incongruent."

But Nigeria and many other African countries are difficult cases when it comes to democracy. In Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa, democracy seems to have become equated with multiparty elections. Once elections are held, democracy is deemed to have taken place. But elections, no matter how free and fair, are not the index of democracy. As Brown (2001) points out, most authoritarian regimes in Africa held multiparty elections in the 1990s, and, despite widespread oppositions, many of these dictators "won" the elections and continued in office. Elections thus became a tool for legitimizing authoritarianism, and a reversal to the old despotic order (Adejumobi, 2000). Marcus, Mease, and Ottemoeller (2001, p. 113) contemplate the multifracted state of African democracy and describe it as not "democracy or authoritarianism but rather some gray area in between." If this is so, several other aspects of democracy may be expected not to fit in well within the African political system, and one may justifiably anticipate some incongruities.

Thus, whereas in some nations, the advent and rise of community radio has been linked to a transition to democracy, in others such expectations have been dashed. In South Africa, for instance, 65 community radio stations went on air within five years of democracy (Olorunnisola, 2002). In fact, in democratic South Africa, community radio took off before commercial radio (Duncan, 2006). But in Ghana and Bangladesh (Ullah & Chowdury, 2006), the coming of democracy and the approval of community radio were separated by years of ceaseless community radio advocacy.

Community Radio Advocacy in Nigeria

Advocacy for community radio in Nigeria predated the official emergence of an advocacy group. Before the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition was formed in 2003, there had been scattered advocacy efforts. In chronicling community radio advocacy in this section, we separate the events into five overlapping phases: academic agitation; birth of a coalition; hopes on the horizon; manpower development for the takeoff; and hopes dashed and denouement.

Phase I: Academic Agitation

The movement for the establishment of community radio stations was pioneered by researchers and scholars. Starting in the 1980s, it became common for

development communication researchers in Nigeria to conclude their research reports or essays with recommendations for the establishment of community media in Nigeria. Among these were Moemeka (1981), Soola (1984, 1988), Adesanoye (1990), Umukoro (1991), and Olorunnisola (1997). Some of them, envisaging the difficulties in effecting an immediate policy swing in favor of community radio, especially given the fact that Nigeria was being ruled by the military for much of those decades, advocated placebos such as ruralized training of broadcasters.

Three factors accounted for the agitation. The dominant paradigm of development had recorded a clear failure toward the end of the 1960s, and in the 1970s development researchers, commentators, and policy makers were articulating and trying out the participatory approach to development (Huesca, 1995; Ojebode, 2008). Catchphrases then were “participation,” “putting the people in the driver’s seat,” and “bottom-up communication.” The logic was if there would be bottom-up communication, the people at the bottom needed the means of communication. That means was usually community media. Given its widespread presence and other qualities (Moemeka, 1981; Olorunnisola, 1997), radio gets mentioned ahead of other community media. Simply put, Nigerian academics were responding to the global paradigm shift in development thinking and drawing specific implications of this shift to the situation at home.

The second factor responsible for the agitation for community radio in the Nigerian academia were the global trends in community broadcasting. Community radio stations were springing up in places outside South America, where community broadcasting had begun in 1947 (Bosch, 2006). Even neighboring and poorer African communities such as Chad and Niger had community radio stations. The global community radio body, Association Mondiale des Radiodiffuseurs Communautaires (AMARC), was formed in 1983, and Nigerians had been actively involved almost from the start. Nigerian academics such as Matthew Umukoro of the University of Ibadan attended global AMARC events and brought reports back to Nigeria (Umukoro, 1991). There were reports that community radio stations were recording tremendous impact on political participation and development. Nigerian academia did not want Nigeria to be left behind. Thus demand for community radio continued to wax in academic scripts.

The third factor was internal and it pertains to the nature of Nigerian society. Nearly each time there is a call for the establishment of community radio in Nigeria, the justification often rests on the multiethnic, multilingual, and multicultural nature of the country, and the failure or inability of the existing broadcast system to meet the cultural, educational, and other needs of the diverse ethnic groups. The centralized broadcast system continued to give ascendancy to the majority and submerge the minority cultures. This, culture advocates thought, was robbing the country of its rich diversity (Ashiwaju, 1989). The way out was

the establishment of community broadcast stations to protect the smaller cultural entities and preserve the national cultural diversity.

Academic agitations for the establishment of community radio continue to this day (e.g., Alimi, 2006; Ojebode 2007, 2008; Ojebode & Adegbola, 2007). This to us indicates that Nigerian academics' faith in community radio remains unshaken. It also shows that the phases of advocacy which we mapped are indeed overlapping.

Phase II: Birth of a Coalition

Nigeria became a democracy in 1999 and the civil society expected immediate slackening of the restraints to community media ownership. When it was clear that this was not to be, segments of the civil society began organized advocacy. The arrowhead of this move was the Institute for Media and Society (IMS) headquartered in Lagos. Assisted by Panos Institute West Africa (PIWA) and AMARC, IMS launched an awareness campaign tagged "Building Community Radio in Nigeria" in 2003. The three partnering organizations set up a steering committee that articulated an action plan (IMS, 2006).

The committee swung into full-fledged advocacy to educate the citizenry on the issues, and to get the government to see reason for a special, that is, less demanding, licensing regime for community radio. First a listserv of those interested in community radio issues in Nigeria was compiled in early 2004. Interaction and education thus moved online. Each time a new community radio was established in a country, far or near, the news was shared online. The activities of the coalition were discussed openly and criticized freely online. Strategies were mapped. Hope was kept alive. Between 2003 and 2004, awareness seminars were conducted in Ibadan, Bauchi, Enugu, and Kaduna—representing four of the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. Participants were drawn from community-based organizations; faith-based organizations; civil society groups; grassroots communities; the media; policy makers; the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), which is the regulatory agency for the broadcast sector; international development agencies; and academia. The seminars generated ideas for engaging community radio development in Nigeria. Policy and reform issues were articulated and submissions were made to government.

In April 2005, IMS, supported by the Open Society Initiative of West Africa (OSIWA), organized a national conference that brought together all participants at the four seminars earlier held in the zones. The conference harmonized and ratified the decisions of the earlier seminars. At that conference, the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition (NCRC) was inaugurated (IMS, 2006).

In a nutshell, the coalition asked the government of Nigeria to honor the African Charter on Broadcasting (ACB) (UNESCO, 2001) to which it was a signatory. Specifically, the coalition asked government to introduce the third

tier of broadcasting, which is community broadcasting, in line with ACB provisions. Part III of ACB defined community broadcasting as that “which is for, by and about the community, whose ownership and management is representative of the community, which pursues a social development agenda, and which is non-profit” (UNESCO, 2001, Part III [1]). The coalition took time to differentiate between decentralized public broadcasting and community broadcasting. A community station is owned by the community, a decentralized public station is owned by government.

The coalition demanded that a different licensing regime be instituted by the government for community radio. Under the current regime, to apply for a license, a person or group must first incorporate a limited liability company. They then purchase an application form from NBC for N50,000 (about US\$417). Upon return the form is screened and taken first to the Minister of Information, then to the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Only the president can decide who will or will not own a broadcasting organization in Nigeria. If he affixes his imprimatur, the would-be station owner is asked to pay for a license for a term of five years. For stations meant to be located where NBC calls Category A (urban and commercial areas), a five-year license costs N20 million (about US\$167,000). For Category B stations (those located in semi-urban areas), a license costs N15 million (about US\$125,000). There used to be Category C stations (those located in rural areas), whose owners were asked to pay N10 million (about US\$83,000). The coalition demanded that these charges, meant for private commercial radio, should not be imposed on community, not-for-profit stations. The fear is that if communities are asked to raise such funds, the rich and the influential will donate the funds and expectedly pocket the station. Eventually, the community station would become a private property (IMS, 2006).

These licensing restraints are a true illustration of what Olorunnisola (2006) describes as theoretical incongruence. The licensing regime was directly transferred from the years of military rule. Political transition was not accompanied by media transition as the old licensing regimes continued to be applied.

Phase III: Hopes on the Horizon

In 2005, an editors’ roundtable was organized by IMS on behalf of the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition. This was a specific media angle of the advocacy process. Twenty editors from print and broadcast media organizations were involved. Following this, six journalists from print and broadcast media were sponsored on study visits to five West African countries that had community radio systems. Upon their return, community radio advocacy moved to the pages of the newspapers and the airwaves (Okusan, 2005; Garba, 2006).

Several international development and civil society groups declared support for the activities of the coalition. Among these were the World Bank and the

Association for Progressive Communications. In early 2006, representatives of these two organizations visited Nigeria to interact with and strengthen the role of community radio advocates, especially the coalition.

A series of publications was released to further strengthen the advocacy. These include *Building Community Radio in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges*, *Survey on Design of Model Community Radio for Nigeria*, *Roadmap to Building a Sustainable Community Radio Sector in Nigeria: A Stakeholders' Charter*, and *Engaging Development: Environment & Content of Radio Broadcasting in Nigeria*. In 2006, the coalition could almost promise a dateline by which government would release a community radio framework for Nigeria. Representatives of the World Bank returned to interact with communities that were ready to have their community radio stations. Also in 2006, the AMARC regional conference was strategically scheduled to coincide with the Nigerian Community Radio Policy Dialogue organized by the coalition in Abuja. At the dialogue, key government representatives (the Minister of Information, the Chair, and the Senate Committee on Information) made statements of commitment to the community radio development process. At a special meeting with the coalition members on behalf of the dialogue, the Information Minister also promised that government would set up a community radio policy working group. For the first time since 2003, government articulated its position on community radio development and it became impossible for government to claim ignorance of the demands of the coalition (IMS, 2006).

Following up on its pledge to the coalition, the government set up a Policy Framework Panel headed by a professor of communication, Alfred Opubor. The panel drafted a comprehensive policy framework for community radio in Nigeria. The framework covers the important areas of licensing, funding, and monitoring of community radio. This was submitted to the Federal Ministry of Information and Communication in 2006.

Phase IV: Manpower Development for the Takeoff

Convinced that the government would fulfill its promises about community radio, the coalition began intensive manpower development for prospective staff of community radio stations. Training materials were designed and some were even published. Materials dealt with skills and techniques for monitoring radio pluralism, community development principles and strategies, strategic planning, and audience research. By this time, the coalition had community radio projects in six willing communities—one from each geopolitical zone. All were waiting for the nod from the government.

While the nation waited, the government suddenly granted radio licenses to eight campuses. Within the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition, this generated a shock and heated discussions online. After the initial shockwaves, the

coalition expressed its appreciation to the government for the emergence of radio stations in institutions of higher learning, stating the important services they could provide in the delivery of education, in giving voice to the population, and in expanding pluralism of the radio sector. But they noted that the ideal community radio on which there had been a common understanding between the government and stakeholders, and on which the former had promised to deliver, was the rural or grassroots community radio. They said a campus radio was not a community radio. This was not a difficult point to make because even NBC, the government agency regulating broadcasting, in its regulatory code treated campus broadcasting differently from community broadcasting (NBC, 2002). Defining a campus radio as a community radio was stretching the word “community” beyond a snapping point.

After making these points clear, the coalition decided to work with the eight campus stations while waiting for real community stations. In June 2007, the IMS in collaboration with the Panos Institute West Africa (PIWA) ran a training program for the staff of the first campus radio station, Unilag FM. Shortly afterward, the partners published *Model Curriculum for the Community Radio Training*. In November 2007, the IMS trained about 40 staff drawn from the nine campuses that had radio licenses as well as from several other campuses that had applied for licenses and were awaiting approval. The training, which was called “Community Development Principles and Strategies,” was held in Lokoja, Kogi State. The following month, another workshop, tagged “Strategic Planning,” was organized for these staff in Akure, Ondo State. In February 2008, the IMS ran another workshop, this time labeled “Audience Research,” for the same category of people. And in April 2008, the IMS organized a workshop tagged “Financial Management, Proposal Writing and Project Reporting.” Also in April 2008, members of the coalition and communities preparing to establish community radio stations went on a ten-day study tour to community radio stations in Ghana.

Phase V: Hopes Dashed and Denouement

The administration of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo handed over power to a new government in May 2007. That transition took the progress recorded by the coalition in its four years of existence back to where it had started. The Ministry of Information during the Obasanjo administration had had the document submitted by the Opubor Panel to work with. It took the document to the National Council on Information, its policy organ, where it was adopted. However, the journey of the document entered a black hole from there. In fact, there were rumors that the document was missing. The Obasanjo administration had been so utterly obsessed about electoral victory that the administration had come to a total halt several months before and during the March 2007 elections (Abati, 2007).

Since May 2007, the new Minister of Information as well as the Chair, Senate Committee on Information, and other holders of key offices have showed little or no knowledge of or interest in the policy document and in the process leading to its emergence. Recent utterances of the leadership of NBC and the comments it attracted from within the coalition have shown that the coalition has to restart almost from scratch. The new NBC director general has advised the coalition to reinstate engagements with the higher policy-making bodies such as the Ministry of Information and the presidency. Sadly, community radio advocacy in Nigeria has reached a denouement and it must return to the beginning.

Community radio advocacy in Nigeria is not without achievements, however, and many of them were landmark. Efforts raised an army of community radio advocates: from 11 in 2003, there are now over 200 individuals and organizations in the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition. Although these advocates are drawn from diverse backgrounds, there is a strong awareness of community radio at the grassroots level across the varied geographical and ethnic locations in the country. In community radio advocacy, Nigerians, known for their divisiveness, have demonstrated their maturity in laying aside ethnic, religious, and political differences and focusing on a unifying goal: the achievement of a community radio system. The coalition played a major role in the review of the NBC code, the making of a frequency spectrum management policy, and the review of the national mass communication policy. It generated awareness among legislators and has succeeded in generally making community radio matters a top priority for media development in Nigeria. It equipped staff of campus radio stations, including those who would work for campus stations awaiting their licenses.

Had government transfer and change of officials been less whimsical, had bureaucratic bottlenecks in the Ministry of Information been more clement, had government been able to see the connection between true community broadcasting and democracy, community radio advocacy would have put radio licenses in the hands of at least six communities by now. Nigeria would not have had the unenviable status of being the only West African country without community radio.

Lessons for Democracy Theory and Advocacy Practice

The foregoing analysis shows that the situation in Nigeria falls short of all the expectations that theorists led us to hold. To some extent, the same restraints imposed on the public arena by the military continue to be maintained by civilian rulers. It is noteworthy that the military moved broadcasting in Nigeria from a one-tier to a two-tier status. The civilian regimes, after ten years, have not been able to move the sector further into the much-advocated three-tier status. A key theoretical lesson here, one which is remarkably counterintuitive, is that

the public sphere may not expand more easily in a democracy than in an autocracy; equality of access to means of communication as message senders may not increase, and restrictions on media ownership may not slacken. It might take the activities of groups and movements to effect the expansion of opportunities for expression, and even those might not produce instant results.

The description of African democracy as not being clear autocracy nor real democracy but some gray area in between (Marcus, Mease, & Ottemoeller, 2001) is apt for Nigeria. If indeed the least common denominator for democracies is expanding access to means of communication and ongoing deliberation (Post, 2005; Olorunnisola, 2006), Nigerian government refusal to promote community radio makes it difficult for one to describe it as a real democracy yet.

This article does not make any assumptions that Nigerian democracy fails based only on government refusal to license community radio. But given the high level of illiteracy in Nigeria, a situation that prevents the majority from patronizing the newspaper, and the indescribably poor state of electricity power supply, a situation that forecloses the use of television for most Nigerians—as well as the inability of the regional and commercial stations to cater to the needs of the rural communities—it is difficult to imagine participation of the majority of Nigerians in the democratic process without a radio that speaks their language and expresses their needs and aspirations. And so, we conclude that indeed the absence of community radio is a serious weakness in Nigerian democracy.

The Nigerian state seems impervious to the demands for leveraging by disadvantaged rural communities for a voice of their own. Radical pluralists (e.g., Jacka, 2003; Karppinen, 2007) suggest the deployment of the instruments of state to leverage disadvantaged groups in order for democracy to thrive. A big question that the foregoing analysis poses is: Which or whose instruments should be deployed should it be found that the state itself stands against the leveraging of disadvantaged groups? Radical pluralists probably do not envisage a state-as-the-obstacle situation, which is what the Nigerian situation exemplifies, and so might be unable to recommend a solution. A substantial recognition of the role of civil society groups in leveraging disadvantaged groups should be built into radical pluralist thoughts. Unfortunately, this article cannot demonstrate that civil society groups are instant achievers in the act of leveraging. It nonetheless upholds their potential for success.

Thus the Nigerian experience teaches us that partnership with international organizations might help in advocacy, but it does not guarantee quick success. In addition to partnership, freely shared information and inspiring leadership are crucial in raising an army of advocates, as has taken place in the emergence and nationwide acceptance of the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition. Civil society groups must rise above the divisiveness of ethnicity, religion, and gender. Proper use of modern information communication technology helps. Yet even

when all these are in place, as they have been in Nigeria, advocates must plan for the long haul.

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