Core Dimensions of Community Radio in Action: The Case of Ghana

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Abstract

The present article seeks to serve as a 'how-to' text. Based on the relatively more matured experiences of some community radio (CR) stations in Ghana, the authors hope it could be a guide to CR stations in Africa and beyond on how to attain what we term the 'core dimensions' of CR that underpin its operations. The study reviews the literature on community radio and highlights some selected data on a survey by Diedong & Naaikuur (2012) to show how effective the implementation of relevant dimensions of CR in Ghana enables people in communities communicate within themselves and with the people making the decisions that affect them. The cases presented point to significant changes that the stations are inducing in various sectors of the lives of their communities across the country through innovative programming strategies. However, despite the significant impact that the CR sector in Ghana is making, there are challenges that need to be addressed to unleash its full potential. Notably, the study is based mainly on earlier studies and the personal experiences of the authors who have had some years of experience working with CR in Ghana.

Keywords: *community radio, core dimensions, innovative programming strategies, cases, personal experiences*

I. Introduction

For more than fifty years, radio has been the most appealing tool for participatory communication and development. It is without doubt the communication medium most widely spread throughout the world and has always been the ideal medium for change (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001). Community radio (CR) has been acclaimed as the most appropriate medium for communicating for social change in grass-root communities, with the result that CR stations have multiplied by the thousands all over the world during the past five decades.

In Africa, with the repudiation of one-party and dictatorial governments, within the past decade, and as monopoly over the media breaks down, small organizations and communities now lift antennas over villages. CR stations and CR networks are active in the media scene in many African countries.

In Ghana for example, there are twelve full-fledged community radio stations and several community-type or grass-root radio stations on air. In addition, many applications are awaiting approval for the allocation of broadcast licenses to start similar stations in the near future. Most of these stations belong to the Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN), an umbrella body whose main role has been to build a strong participatory ethos for CR (Diedong & Naaikuur, 2012).

The main objective of the present article which draws on some key works on CR in general (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001; Fraser & Estrada, 2001; Alumuku, 2007; Shama, 2011) and some data on CR in Ghana, especially a survey by Diedong & Naaikuur 2012, is to show how CR in Ghana is serving as a communication tool enabling people in communities to communicate within themselves and with the people making the decisions that affect them. Particularly, it discusses the following core dimensions in the operations of CR: (a) facilitating a process of involvement of various sectors of the community in a participatory discussion to define problems and find solutions,(b) providing a selected flow of news information from national,regional, and international sources,(c) mobilizing communities to demand accountability from local government authorities, d) reinforcing local cultural identity and promoting local talents, e) introducing dialogue for peace-building and conflict resolution, f) introducing discussions to address felt injustices, g) promoting indigenous creative practices peculiar to the local

communities, h) educating people regarding democratic procedures in elections for avoiding corruption, etc.

It also shows that even though CR in Ghana still grapples with some challenges in terms of following faithfully the principles of good CR with full participation and involvement of the people of the community, it is relatively more successful than its counterparts in other jurisdictions. For instance, based on personal visits to successful CRs in Africa and data from some fifteen or twenty studies of community radio in Tanzania, East Africa and other parts of Africa over the last ten years or so, White (2011) asserts that CR in East Africa is much less successful than in Ghana.

II. Involvement of All Community Sectors in Defining Problems and Finding Solutions

When societies are affected by huge inequalities in gaining access to resources, power, and decision making concerning social coordination, the changing processes required to facilitate an integral, participatory, and inclusive development can be met with some resistance. In particular, because of their marginal position, rural communities in the developing world, often experience right violations when activities that affect their lives negatively are undertaken by external agents without the communities' participation. Unsure of the best way to show their resentments, such situations can develop into violent conflicts. When community radio (CR) comes in, it plays a mediatory role in initiating a dialogue by involving all sectors of the communities to engage with the external actors in search of a solution to the problem. This process involves community mobilization for collective action for problem-solving and social change.

One remarkable strength of CR stations in Ghana has been their ability to mobilize community people and external actors to resolve differences in a win-win spirit. *Royal FM* in the Brong-Ahafo region undertook a community mobilization drive to solve an environmental

problem, which communities within its broadcast areas had been grappling with (Diedong & Naaikuur, 2012). The communities are located in a forest belt where illegal timber-logging activities were rampant. Over a long period, illegal timber contractors, known as chain-saw operators, invaded the forest areas with their timber-logging activities. These activities, carried out in an indiscriminate manner, had negative impact on the ecology and other livelihoods of the communities. The communities often met the contractors with violent reactions occasionally leading to death or physical injuries.

Through a project known as Community Participation in Natural Resource Management (CPNRM), *Royal FM* embarked on educating the community on the their rights to protect their natural resources and the need for timber contractors to be responsible in their activities. The programmes also touched upon the role of the local government authorities to step in to streamline the operations of timber-logging in the Ghanaian communities in general.

The project was done with two communities, namely *Agubie* and *Tromiso*. The strategy was to record the voices of the communities – men, women, youth, opinion and traditional leaders – expressing their strong emotions about what was happening to their livelihoods. When the community voices were aired, they triggered the reaction of timber contractors who insisted on a right to respond. The contractors would even pay for airtime to speak into the microphone. Now, both the communities and contractors pointed fingers at some local authorizes of the District Assembly who allegedly were bribed into granting concessions for illegal timber-logging activities and closing their eyes to the inimical consequences of such activities. These accusations inevitably brought the District Assembly to the studios to respond. In the end, the three sides (communities, timber contractors and the District Assembly staff) felt the need to

have a face-to-face dialogue to discuss the issues raised on air. The meeting was animated by the *Royal FM* staff.

The process led to some fruitful results. Communities made a very strong point that they were not against timber-logging per se. What they wanted was that the activities should be undertaken in demarcated areas and with sensitivity to their rights. The District Assembly strengthened by-laws on the management of forest resources to ensure that timber contractors would restrict their activities to demarcated areas. In addition, the contractors would in the future compensate the communities for acts which were detrimental to their interests.

III. A Selected Flow of News Information from Regional, National and International Sources

A main communication problem in Africa is that information is not getting to the rural marginalized and lower status populations. The health, agriculture and education sectors do not provide intelligible and relevant information that will be useful to communities. Mainstream media (radio, television and newspapers) are not helping either in this case. Such media are not concerned with issues that interest poor people, e.g. agrarian conflicts, corrupt traditional rulers and the violations of the rights of women and children.

CR can, and should, play an important role in its capacity to present interesting and relevant news to meet the information needs of marginalized communities. Writing on the importance of news on CR, A. J. Graham (1995) says that in principle stations have a mandate and owes it as a duty to the community to present them with comprehensive news. The role that CR can play well is that of presenting news that is truly relevant to the listeners within its broadcast range. Being the voice of the "poor," which in many rural contexts means everyone, the key way CR can present relevant news is that the radio station looks at the news in the way the poor and illiterate

look at it. The kind of story that would be of interest to, for example, the rural farmer would be one on when government subsidized fertilizer would be available to support his farming activities. In addition, the farmer would be interested in hearing which markets offer good prices for his farm produce. In a similar way, women would be interested in news that would motivate them to form successful cooperatives to enhance their livelihoods in order to be able to pay their children's school fees.

CR reporters have an advantage over their counterparts in the mainstream media in terms of reporting news that has the potential of having positive impacts on their communities. As Birgitte Jallov(2012) notes, unlike journalists in the mainstream media who work on the basis of distance from and neutrality towards their stories, CR workers are broadcasting from within. As they identify, research, and report on issues that affect their communities, they report on issues that also have an impact on themselves and their lives.

Rural people also want to be part of the national, regional, and even international communication processes going on. Meeting such needs would involve providing a selected flow of news information from regional, national and international sources. Access to such varied information would enable community leaders to take advantage of programmes that are of use to the community to defend their interests.

In trying to meet the news information needs of their communities, CR stations in Ghana adopt various approaches to produce and present news. In general, most CR stations, apart from their own reporters, rely on various sources including newspapers, the Ghana News Agency, and other radio stations for stories that are interesting and are of relevance to local situations. Each news bulletin offers a careful mix of national, regional, and global items which are translated and

presented in the respective local languages. The sources of the local stories become resource persons for the daily current affair programmes.

Since CR usually does not have a large team of professional reporters, the best way to produce sufficient community news is by developing a network of volunteer village correspondents. The approach of *Radio Progress* in news production is an interesting case. The station has a network of village volunteer news reporters and producers called Community Communication Teams (CCTs). These volunteers spend time in the villages identifying program themes and producing and evaluating previous programs with the listeners. They also record news on significant local events and on the activities of community-based organizations such as women and youth groups as well as those of local authorities. On weekly basis, the recordings are sent to the station for editing and broadcast. Depending on the availability of telephone services, a volunteer can call the station to give a live report. From time to time, the volunteers will be brought together to share their experiences among themselves, give feedback to the station and make suggestions for improvement in their role and the work of the station as a whole.

Moreover, *Radio Progress* has developed a collaborative relationship with other news outlets in the Upper West Region including the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC). This enables *Radio Progress* to have regular access to news from a variety of sources. The relationship with the GBC has gone beyond the sharing of news to co-utilization of technical facilities, joint training and exchange of programmes. Since each of them is limited in a way in relation to the others, the exchange of news and programmes among the stations will spread their services to as many people as possible in the region. An important lesson to be learnt from the collaborative relationship between *Radio Progress* and the GBC is reflected in the statement by Alumuku

when he said, "CR is not necessarily opposed to national broadcasting. On the contrary, it could actually complement it" (Alumuku, 2007, p. 22).

IV. Mobilizing Communities to Demand Accountability from Local Government Authorities

Critics and analysts of decentralized local governance in developing countries argue that efforts of most countries to de-centralize government decision making, so that government will be more responsive to local needs, has not improved services because there is poor flow of communication between local governments and communities (Santi, 2012, on Ghana for example). White (2008), for instance, notes that generally local communities and districts do not have a communication structure to articulate the needs at the local level, bring this to the local government, and monitor and put pressure on it to respond to community needs. It is further observed that the well-known watch-dog role of the media in promoting governance is weak at the local levels in most African countries (White, 2008). The national media operating in the national metropolitan city are making central governance more accountable through investigative reporting and continuous reporting on the efficiency of government response to problems. However, this kind of media pressure generally does not exist at the district and regional level.

According to these views, what is needed is a communication system which can allow citizens to have a say in how they are governed by the local authorities and how they want their communities to move forward. The communication system should also empower local communities to hold their leaders accountable and put pressure on them to provide their needs. All major works on communication and local governance have pointed to community media, especially the radio, for their potential for involving rural and urban poor populations in the struggles against and the search for solutions to the socio-economic development challenges of

their communities (Fraser & Estrada, 2001; The World Bank, 2003; Alumuku, 2007; Santi, 2011; Jallov, 20012; Shama, 2011; Orengo & Harford, 2013).

In general terms, CR, as the World Bank (2003) notes, can act as a tool to promote social alternatives in a number of ways. As a voice of the local people, the radio can influence local governments to adopt policies that respond to their needs. As a public watchdog, the radio can keep a critical eye on government performance and can check on the misuse of power, incompetence and corruption. It can make governments more responsive to criticism of their policies and service delivery. Furthermore, CR stations can be critical enablers of information, voice, and capacities for dialogue and negotiation with public authorities. The existence of a wide network of CR stations – broadcasting sound development content, disseminating information, and providing a space for dialogue about public issues – is an effective means of civic engagement of poor people, especially the illiterate poor. It allows for interaction, dialogue, and direct community voice, as well as access to decision meetings and events.

A few empirical studies have given evidence of how some CR stations have used various strategies to improve local governance in Africa. Shama (2011), for instance, recounts how CR in Zambia made possible for ordinary people to have powers to summon their leaders and make them accountable. Similarly, Orengo & Harford (2013) report that, through a project dubbed Village Voices for Development (VVD), which aimed at using radio to promote good governance in Madagascar, the voices of ordinary villagers were strengthened through radio programmes in which they participated in regional and village debates with decision makers, thereby making local authorities more responsive to their development needs and more accountable for local services.

In the case of Ghana, some CR stations have championed the course of their communities in many ways including giving meaning to decentralization and local governance. For example, a study conducted by Al-Hassan *et al.* (2011) gave evidence on how *Simli Radio*, in the Northern Region, used various strategies to initiate interactions between duty bearers and right holders in two operational districts of the radio. The study recounts that a woman leader, Asheitu, explained that through the radio, "We now know that our MPs are there for development. They can no more cheat and have to bring development to our communities." The study concluded that the interactive sessions provided by the station for local authorities, including members of Parliament (MPs) to explain government policies and programmes, led to the promotion of a culture of accountability and transparency.

There is evidence that local authorities do respond to the pressure put on them by the communities through their CRs. Alumuku (2007) narrates how an environmental sanitation programme on *Radio Ada* concentrating on local government's negligence got the authorities to act. Following a series of programmes on rubbish dumps in the markets, the local government felt constrained to take action. A bulldozer and a tipper were dispatched along with a number of labourers to work on the site.

V. Reinforcing Local Cultural Identity and Promoting Local Talents

In many African countries, CR has made a concerted attempt to promote the local language and artistic linguistic expression, for example, in storytelling, the local music, the local dance, the local drama and, in general, the local historical memory. State radio has generally militated against such promotion of the indigenous culture. The commercial radio stations, even when they use the vernacular language, tend to highlight the music and drama of the national and transnational entertainment industries.

This implies that before the advent of CR in Ghana, and indeed in most African countries, many tribal and minority groups were unhappy about the fact that their identities were missing from the mainstream radio and television services. The lack of media content that reflected traditional cultures, coupled with modernity, contributed to the fast declining interests in traditional storytelling and communal entertainments among the youth. Therefore, CR stations have become welcome tools for reinvigorating these forms of traditional entertainments that held African communities together (Fraser & Estrada, 2001; Alumuku, 2007).

So strong is the aim to use community radio for the promotion of community cultural values that many CR stations have a strong policy to encourage the exclusive use of local languages and songs in their broadcasting. Another important role CR stations play in the culture of their communities is to use programmes that can highlight and encourage positive values andto also dissuade negative cultural trends. In Ghana, all the CR stations have weekly programmes in which elders, who are viewed, as repositories of wisdom will, give advice to the younger generations. The programmes, among other intentions, seek to reinforce traditional moral and community values. On the other hand, the stations have used the programmes to challenge many of the negative customs in the Ghanaian community, denouncing cultural practices like female genital mutilation, obnoxious widowhood rights, and the abuse of the dowry system.

A major area of African culture that many CR stations devote attention to promote is the local musical talents. Radio is above all a music medium and most radio programming is music. These stations give priority to locally produced music and promote the best of local talent. In most communities of Ghana, as in other African countries, there are often dozens of local music groups. All churches, schools and community organizations have their choirs and soloists, many of them are of excellent quality. Much of this music is composed by local people about local

events. All community events, from graduations to weddings and funerals, are family and community celebrations with music and dancing. In some communities, there are persons of unusual musical talent that are willing to perform even regularly for the community. CR gives a chance for young people to try out their talents as a means of starting, hopefully, their own careers. CR is able to discover an amazing range of local talents.

Writing on how some CR stations in parts of Africa promote local music (White, 2011) recalls that a CR station in Southern Zambia has an annual festival in which hundreds of music groups come from all over the country to compete. The festival always attracts some of the top talent in the country which are, of course, prize winning. This contest furnishes some of the best music played on that CR station for a good part of the year. He concludes, "I will never forget discovering in a visit to one CR that a local person had a hobby of collecting jazz records and regularly putting the records on a weekly programme playing and explaining the music of famous jazz stars!" (White, 2011, p. 7)

In many CR stations in Ghana, drama programmes are another standard type of radio programmes through which the stations promote artistic talents. One may not think that lower-status groups have much capacity for producing radio drama. In fact, there are many amateur drama groups and comedy groups in rural and urban communities in Africa in general. White (2011) again recalls that in a visit to Radio Ada in Ghana, in one studio, a young Ada-speaking student of drama in the University of Ghana was training a group of volunteers from the community to produce a radio drama that the group itself had produced. Through the drama programmes, the Ghanaian creativity is demonstrated in the easy way communities can spontaneously dramatize situations. In general, the genre of social drama as a participatory one involves inviting people from various sections or villages to spontaneously dramatize problems,

which are recorded and broadcast on the radio. There are two approaches to making this successful. One will be to ask the people in the villages to select themes and prepare a very simple dramatization. On the day this is presented in the community, the mobile team of the station goes out to record it with comments about the significance of this drama for their community. This is broadcast, and comments from other communities are also invited and broadcast. The second approach is that the radio station selects a theme, which is dramatized, say at the beginning of the week. Next, recordings of the programs are taken to the villages by animators who record people's reactions. Finally, an edited version of the program is re-broadcast over the latter days of the week, gradually incorporating more comments and letters from the listeners and discussing what action can be taken. This method will have an extra appeal in communicating issues for social change because it contains elements of multi-media as it combines radio with interpersonal and group interaction techniques.

The impact of radio drama is illustrated in the following short testimony. In an earlier study on CR in Ghana, the authors of this article were interacting with women in *Dalon*, the base community of Simli Radio in the Northern Region (Diedong & Naaikuur, 2012). Thirty-four year old Amina Seidu, who had been hiding her face in silence, suddenly burst into laughter and disappeared behind a mango tree. Her laughter was prompted by a question on which programmes the women liked most on their CR station. When the woman was encouraged to explain her laughter, she whispered in Dagbani, the language of the station's broadcast "kperigu" meaning drama. She further explained "My husband had been in the habit of beating me up on the least provocation. One day, he listened to a radio drama on domestic violence in which a man who had physically assaulted his wife was arrested by the police. The man ended up in a prison to serve for two years. My husband was scared by the drama episode and vowed not to beat me

again." Most of the women in the group attested to the popularity of radio drama. Those whose homes did not have radio sets claimed they would abandon whatever activity they were carrying out in their homes to go to a neighbour's compound to listen to a drama programme.

VI. Introducing Dialogue for Peace-Building and Conflict Resolution

The international media has always been accused of creating a haunting image for Africa as a place replete with wars and conflicts, among other malaise. However, the reality is that, many African communities are experiencing an increasing amount of violence and insecurity which grows out of struggle for land and other resources. Overall, socio-economic advancement of the conflict is the sufferer.

Africans had always relied on traditional conflict resolution mechanisms such as dialogue circles to resolve conflicts and to maintain peace. CR has proven to be a strong new platform for dialogue andconflict resolution in some African communities (cf. Alumuku, 2007; Jallov, 2012). For instance, the organization Search for Common Ground (SFCG) has identified the important effects of a programme run in Liberia since 2007 and in Sierra Leon since 2000 which SFCG had supported with public information, dialogue, community outreach, and capacity building through radio projects like news shows, soap operas, and community outreach projects. As a result, SFCG's evaluation concluded that overall CR continued to play a strong role in local peace-building. Specifically, programming that directly addressed issues related to community inclusiveness and non-violent conflict resolution had meaningful impact across locations. CR stations were also noted as active agents in defusing local conflict and preventing backsliding into violence (SFCG 2009, as cited in Jallov, 2012).

In Ghana, CR is proving to be one of the major instruments for peace because of the method of inviting people of different points of view to find consensus on how to solve common

problems. *Radio Peace* began in a region of tribal conflict, violent gangs, and struggle over land and a host of other disputes. The station began by bringing together the chiefs of the area to make a pledge of peace, and they return to make progress reports. The station promotes work with unemployed youth that are prone to violence. A community festival every year, with all the different clans and ethnic groups, celebrates their unity in diversity. The station finds ways of helping the poor and often desperate marginalized and has become a focal point for the socio-economic development of the region (Alumuku, 2007).

Radio Peace has an early warning system to report any illegal activity or violence so that this can be settled. Management of the station recounted that one day a young man came from a village known as Apam claiming that the chief of the village had sold a piece of land belonging to the community for eight thousand Ghana Cedis, about twelve thousand one hundred and sixty US dollars. He did not want to tell the story through the radio but indicated that out of anger he wanted to bomb the village. The station quickly informed the security agencies who conducted an intensive investigation to the allegation. The move forestalled the likely creation of a communal conflict (Diedong & Naaikuur, 2012).

CR in Ghana has also been involved in promoting dialogue among religions. *Radio Progress* is well known for the promotion of religious understanding among various Christian denominations and between Christians and Muslims in the Upper Wes t Region. Even though the origins of the station can be traced to the Catholic Church, the station has maintained an open door policy on religious broadcasting. Equal opportunity is given to all religious groups to broadcast religious programmes reflecting their faiths. Muslims in particular are overtly appreciative for being allowed to freely use the radio every Friday for their worship programme. "Muslims have always wondered aloud about the generosity of the Catholic Church and question

whether their Muslim norms would allow the same generosity if they had been granted the license themselves" (Alumuku, 2007, p. 205). This "evangelization mission" of Radio Progress has contributed to the reputation of the Upper West Region as the most peaceful in Ghana.

VII. Introducing Discussions to Address Felt Injustices and Abuse of Human Rights

One of the most felt areas of injustice in Africa is the abuse of the fundamental rights of the more vulnerable parts of the population, such as children, women, the elderly, people living with disabilities, the sick and the otherwise weakened. Often in cases of abuse and where the powers-that-be misuse their power, reference is made to culture and tradition as an explanation and justification. However, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees the rights of everyone: strong or weak, famous or marginalized, educated or uneducated, young or old, including all ethnic groups, both sexes, all religions and sexual behaviours.

Human rights are most often among the fundamental issues of development that form the framework for a regular editorial group of CR stations. Most CR stations have human rights as one of their regular thematic programme areas, and some CR stations in particularly vulnerable environments and areas have right-related issues as their main focus (Jallov, 2012). While the level of immediate threat and abuse is very different from community to community, human rights will always be central to the issues of CR for development, opening the microphone to issues and to groups within the community who have not previously had a forum or active voice. A CR must always focus on identifying and addressing rights as well as the lack of rights for the more vulnerable parts of the population.

There are examples of how human rights programming in CR is improving respect of human rights and addressing injustice in some African countries. Drawing from impact assessment report on a human rights programme dubbed 'Human Rights Is the Mother of All Community

Change' in Radio KKCR in Western Uganda, Jallov (2012) relates two of a wide range of human rights related impact stories as follows:

> In this community the police used to behave as if they were completely above the law. If they wanted to extort money from you all they did was to arrest you and put you in detention without any charge or with very flimsy charges. We never thought even for a moment that there was a law which protected us as citizens. Since the programmes on radio started, now everyone knows that you cannot be detained for over a certain number of hours (28 hours) without being charged. The most interesting thing for us now is that KKCR brings the top police officers to explain to us on radio what they do, how they do it and why they do it… (p. 122)

The media in Ghana have been credited with many socio-cultural changes the country is experiencing. One of their main contributions that deserve special mention is the advocacy role for the recognition of and respect for the human rights of the marginalized in society. CR stations in particular have put it high on their agenda to champion the causes of women, children, the aged and particularly the physically challenged. A case in point is the disability programme on *Radio Progress*. Since 1997 when the station started, the Upper West Branch of the Association of the Disabled in Ghana was granted a free weekly slot. The aim of the disability programme was two-fold: to fight the stigma attached to disability and to ensure that all their rights enshrined in the 1992 Constitution were accorded them. Notable in the latter regard is the fact that the Constitution has stipulated that two per cent of the District Assembly Common Funds be dedicated to the support of the activities of the country's disabled people. However, most district assemblies were reluctant in releasing the disability funds. The disabilityprogramme on Radio Progress challenged the assemblies and put pressure on them resulting in some districts in the

Upper West Region regularly releasing the money due to the disabled. The use of such funds has undoubtedly enhanced the living conditions of persons with disabilities in the area.

The disability programmes have also challenged the injustices and stigmatization against people with disability shown by the community. At the end of each broadcast, the host of the programme would vow that the disabled people would not stop speaking against any actions and tendencies that tended to undermine their rights and dignity as human beings. Two significant results of the programmes include:

1. An increased recognition of the rights of disabled children in general, and particularly those of the blind and deaf to have access to education. Many blind, deaf and dumb children from across the region have been enrolled at the Wa Schools for the Blind and Deaf.

2. A general change of social attitude towards people with disability. For instance, a beautiful blind lady who regularly spoke on the programmes attracted men, many of whom pressed suits for marriage until one of them succeeded in marrying her.

VIII. Promoting Indigenous Creative Practices Peculiar to the Local Communities

In the light of the inadequate opportunities for knowledge development for entrepreneurial skills and those needed for the improvement of other sectors of rural economies, it is pertinently important to promote indigenous knowledge in the areas of agriculture, health, and conflict resolution of Africa in particular. Unfortunately, due to a lingering misconception about "modern development," the indigenous knowledge base of the African populations is often frowned upon as being inferior to western scientific knowledge. However, in reality, for the majority of the people who live in rural areas their indigenous knowledge systems provide the frame for them to make meaning of their world and development.

Therefore, if the call for peoples' participation in development will make any impact, a stronger call should be made for the recognition of the continuous relevance of the indigenous knowledge systems of rural communities who only perceive the realities of their world, their everyday realities and their challenges of development in the framework of their cultural heritage. A fundamental step in this direction is to have a strong belief in the development process of African communities that rural and urban lower status people have a wealth of knowledge and problem-solving ideas that they can share among themselves and with local authorities. For example, a five hectare farm plot of a so-called "peasant farmer" is, in fact, a tremendously complicated farming system. When one begins to talk to rural people, one finds that the farmer with a plot of maize, a few chickens and cattle is constantly trying out new ways to improve his production – very conservatively, of course, because if he makes one mistake, he starves. The lady selling vegetables in the market is constantly trying out new methods of sales improvement. Every carpenter and bicycle repairman is trying out new ideas.

One of the crucial roles of CR is the promotion of creative practices which still have the potential to provide solutions to the complex mix of problems confronting their communities. By the orientation of CR as an educational radio, as opposed to the old form of education from "experts" to supposed knowledge-less illiterate peasants, CR can help sustain the rich indigenous knowledge base of the African rural populations. For instance, professionals – agricultural extension agents, community nurses and doctors, small industry guides—are invited into programs, but are presented as sharing ideas and solutions with farmers, pregnant mothers, and market ladies. Particularly attractive are field demonstrations out in rural communities or urban neighborhoods. This gives a farmer and the people of a village the chance to show off what they

have accomplished and to share it with others in the radius of the radio station. CR puts all these people into dialogue bringing out their little success stories and best ideas.

In general, the media in Ghana have been at the forefront in the promotion of indigenous creative practices. For instance, herbal medical practitioners who claim to have found some cures to illnesses have used the media, especially radio, to make their claims. Newspapers have also devoted spaces to highlighting creative works of artisans. In the same way, the Ghanaian media have also acted as watchdogs exposing charlatan claims in traditional medical practices aimed at instilling sanity in traditional medical practice in the country.

In this regard, CR stations in Ghana have championed the cause of promoting creative practices in local communities particularly in the health and agricultural sectors. In the health sector, *Simli Radio* in the Northern Region broadcasts regular programmes that highlight the potential of herbal medicines in treating common ailments like fevers and diarrhea (Al-Hassan *et al*., 2011). The programmes also become platforms for renowned traditional healers in the local communities not only to expose their curative prowess but also to educate people on traditional measures of preventing illnesses. Testimonies by cured clients of these herbalists are also encouraged. In a similar way, *Radio Progress* in its weekly health education programmes also involves traditional birth attendants who are the first line people to attend to pregnant and women in labour in communities that are far away from any health facilities. The programme gives these "village doctors" the opportunity to showcase their role in the health delivery system in rural areas, the frustrations they face, and above all the need for their knowledge and expertise to be accorded due recognition and be integrated into mainstream medical practice.

On the agricultural front, some of the CR stations in Ghana have adopted creative programming strategies to facilitate the sharing of indigenous and environmentally sustainable

farming practices to other farmers in the form of oral testimonies. In an interaction with the manager of *Radio FREED*, Mr. RuphiionKuupiel, in Nandom in the Upper West Region of Ghana, he recounted an experience when a farmer in the community of Gozir was invited to the studios to explain how he managed to have good crop harvest even during a year that generally saw poor harvests due mainly to drought. The farmer narrated that his secret lay in the use of animal manure. The radio producer challenged him that many farmers in the area also used manure; however, the farmer said that he preserved his manure in such a manner that it was protected from direct heat and other weather conditions that could make the manure lose its potency. The Radio Manager concluded that many farmers attested to the fact that the testimony had changed their perception towards animal manure.

IX. Educating People regarding Democratic Procedures in Elections and Avoiding Corruption

There is quite a considerable amount of literature which point to the potential role of CR in promoting democratic culture. For instance, Fraser and Estrada (2001) have discussed that CR can enhance democratic culture from the local to the national levels by introducing a system of community building through communication by connecting people with other people's organizations, and people with officials and government functionaries. Steins (2002) adds that Community radio introduces 'democratic talk' by creating a platform on which active citizens in the community, who recognize common interests and goals, can deliberate and debate. Fraser and Estrada (2001) further underscore the fact that this function of CR is in keeping with the decentralization process now being implemented in many countries, the purpose of which is to bring democratic decision-making closer to the people concerned. Public debates aired by the community radio will certainly be heard by locally based staff of government and private

institutions and the radio's content should be relayed by them to their superiors. This will lay the foundation for development initiatives that are responsive to the community's felt needs.

No doubt that CR has contributed to the development of the budding democratic culture in many African countries over the past two decades. The importance of their involvement in the different kinds of civic education before and during elections is obvious. During elections, CR stations get preliminary results based on the first, local count of votes out to the community immediately after the disclosure of the polling stations. This has the potential to curb some of the blatant, and frequent, cases of electoral fraud where votes are manipulated (suppression and ballot stuffing) before arriving at their final provincial or national destination. The case below highlights this potential role of CR around elections:

During Mozambique's 2003 and 2004 elections, the Community Radios and Community Multimedia Centres worked hard to demystify the election process by informing listeners of their rights, explaining relevant legal frameworks and the importance and implications of elections in a budding democracy like Mozambique…As a result more people participated in the elections, which also took place in a much more peaceful and orderly atmosphere, according to observers with much less political and ethnic tension. Due to the large corps of well-trained volunteer radio producers, Radio Dondo was present at all polling stations, and was first to communicate election results. No other local, provincial or national media had a comparative coverage. (Hughes and Pringle 2003, as cited in Jallov 2012, p. 105)

CR stations have made significant contributions to the democratic dispensation of Ghana since 2000. Before the advent of CR in the country, rural people had inadequate access to information during electioneering campaigns. Mainstream media were used by politicians for propaganda and because they mostly used official national languages understood by the few

literates, the majority had little chance of getting to know their political candidates. This situation rendered them very susceptible to manipulation and vote buying by politicians.

The presence of CR, therefore, has changed this situation dramatically and presented opportunities for rural folks to make politically informed choices. The main role CR has played in the 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012 general elections has been to do intensive voter education to enable rural people make informed choices in voting for presidential and parliamentary candidates. The 2000 general elections, which saw a change of government from the then ruling National Democratic Council (NDC) to the National Patriotic Party (NPP) is a strong testimony of the power of CR in building sound sense of political judgment among ordinary people. CR stations, which were mobilized and supported by the Media Foundation for West Africa, undertook intensive political education at the grass-root levels and this definitely helped to over-turn the usual trends of elections in the country. The fact that an incumbent party lost the elections to a leading opponent, according to political analysts, was a new phenomenon and marked a strong watershed. In fact, it is on record that, the new President of Ghana, John AgyekumKuffuor, in his victory speech acknowledged the role of private media, and particularly CR in the country,in helping his party to win the elections (Naaikuur, 2003).

The most significant episode involving CR in electioneering activities was in the 2008 elections (Diedong& Naaikuur, 2012). In the presidential elections, the Ghana Electoral Commission refused to declare a winner in the nation's run-off saying it would have to rerun the elections in the Tain Constituency in the Brong Ahafo Region in early January 2009. Tension mounted in the country, especially in the Brong Ahafo Region, because the nation turned total attention towards the outcome of the elections. Former Presidents J.J. Rawlings, of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), and J.A. Kuffuor, of the New Patriotic Party (NNP), were

expected to be part of the decisive voting at Tain. *Royals FM,* by then the only CR in the area, played a crucial role. The people depended on the station to tell them what to do. The radio boldly informed the people not to fear or panic but to vote freely. More importantly and to the surprise of observers of the heavily polarized media scene during the election period, the station resisted attempts by the parties to influence it with money to broadcast messages to influence the voters. The station acted professionally by granting equal airtime to the two political parties for their campaign messages. The outcome was peaceful though the NPP boycotted the elections.

As has been shown above, election times can hold excellent opportunities for CR stations to shine and serve the community. At the same time, election periods are usually times of much political tension, and in contexts where the legislation is not very detailed clearly about the role and space of CR, a lot of pressure can be exerted on the radio stations. In this situation, as Jallov (2012) notes, politicians at central level may worry about information-sharing in languages they do not understand, in locations they do not have access to, and local politicians can be tempted to exert a lot of pressure on CR stations to influence, if not to dominate, the messages passed. However, as *Royals FM* showed, and as many CR stations in Ghana would have known through experiences, it is absolutely crucial during election periods to maintain an open, unbiased approach, where all voices and attitudes of the community have a legitimate space. As the community's own voice and meeting point, facilitating the development debate among all of the communities within the overall community, the radio station depends on the full confidence of all.

In the 2012 elections, the CR stations stepped up their role in political education in a more radical way. With support from an NGO, Strengthening Transparency, Accountability and Responsiveness in Ghana, known as STAR-GHANA, the Ghana Community Radio Network

(GCRN) mobilized its members under a project dubbed 'Community Participation in 2012 Elections.' The main goal of the project was for "stations to broadcast programmes for wider dialogue and consensus among their listening communities for a development-driven Election 2012" (Ghana Community Radio Network, 2012, p. 1). A manifesto dubbed 'People's Manifesto' was derived from participatory community research by the 12 CR stations to guide the programmes. An excerpt of the Manifesto states:

For those seeking our vote in Election 2012, therefore, our People's Manifesto also asks a big, fundamental question: WHO WILL MAKE DECENTRALIZATION WORK FOR US, FINALLY? Who can explain, soberly and lucidly, in the respective local languages that our communities speak and understand, why Decentralization has not delivered to date? Who will own up to their part in not making Decentralization work? Who will, concretely, facilitate vigorous, meaningful Community Participation? Who will, concretely, give voice to and empower Women? Youths? PWDs? Who will take affirmative action for genuine Community Radio? WHO WILL OFFER CONCRETE, REALISTIC, CREDIBLE STEPS TO MAKE DECENTRALIZATION WORK? (Ghana Community Radio Network 2012, p. 1)

The main activities of the Community Participation in the 2012 Elections Project could be summed up as follows:

1. Broadcast of a series of locally produced programmes following guidelines from the GCRN which sought to develop consciousness of local communities to critically examine the campaign manifestos of the various parties seeking their mandate in the 2012 elections.

2. To empower communities to challenge and commit parliamentary candidates to community-driven development agendas once they received their mandates.

3.   Providing live election coverage through deploying their radio staff and volunteers at polling stations.

Overall, it can be asserted that the involvement of CR has contributed significantly to the enhancement of election outcomes in Ghana and to the image of the country as a beacon of democracy in the African continent.

X. Education of the Public regarding Better Cultural Practices

African societies are beginning to interrogate some elements of their cultural heritage, which have been considered outdated and inimical to their socio-economic advancements. Ghana is not an exception in this process of cultural re-evaluation. Obnoxious cultural practices, which have engaged public attention, include female genital mutilation, widowhood rites and ostentations spending on funerals. Leaders from most religious and political divides, civil society organizations, NGOs and the media have stressed the need for the total abolition or review of these practices to allow development to take place.

CR stations, in line with their social change mandates, have added creditable voices to the process of cultural reevaluation by the communities. In this regard, episodes of positive change have occurred across communities where CR stations have championed causes to change specific cultural norms and practices. A case in point involves the CR station in the Dormaa District of the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana. The *Dormaa F.M.*, following a report by the District Director of Education on a steady fall in the standards of education in the area, generated community debate around the issue of education. The debates established that a major cause of the state of affairs was the lack of parental care for children. This, in turn, was caused by too much time and money being spent on funerals. In response to the radio campaign, the Dormaa Traditional Council intervened by ordering that all funerals should be held on the last week of the month

against the weekly celebrations in the traditional area. In addition, the extravagant manifestations in funerals like serving of alcoholic drinks and wearing of expensive clothes were banned. The overall effect is saving of time and money that used to be spent on funerals.

Another example of an induced social change through CR in Ghana is on female children education in the Upper West Region. Alumuku (2007) notes that for cultural reasons female children did not have equal access to formal education as their male counterparts in the past. *Radio Progress*, in line with its core objective to promote holistic and integral human development, initiated a programme to educate the community on the importance of educating female children. The report concludes that as a result of the radio's constant appeals on the issue, female children education in the area has witnessed a significant boost.

XI. Challenges of Operating Truly Community-Based Radio

The CR movement in Ghana has been able to make some remarkable progress, but there are some challenges confronting its operation. One of the major challenges is how to enlist the effective participation of their core listening communities in their operations and to create a sense of community ownership. According to the World Association of Community Radios (AMARC), a community radio's main communication strategy is participation. This type of participation is not limited to sending messages to the public; it is an agent for social change, cultural development and democratisation (Price-Davies &Tacchi, 2001). This implies for every community broadcaster a democratic dimensionand popular participation in the management of the station and in the production of programs. There are some general principles or characteristics which several experts agree are fundamental to the operation of good and successful community radio (Fraiser & Estrada, 2001). These include community ownership and democratic management of radio stations.

As compared to the actual situation on the ground in implementing the principles outlined above, the biggest challenge demonstrated by the study is how to effectively put into practice the involvement of community members in the management of the station and the creation of a sense of community ownership. In terms of grasping the real concept of CR, there is a wide gap in understanding between the management of CR and community members in whose interest the stations are established. If CR is set up for a particular community, it means that the radio station is one that is owned by the people it serves. This principle implies in fundamental terms that the communities whose members, motivated by community consciousness and willingness to pool resources, agree that they want their own radio station in order to advance their community should initiate the radio. In this case, "the facilities of a community radio are almost invariably owned by the community through a trust, foundation, cooperative, or some similar vehicle" (Fraser & Estrada, 2001, p. 17). When a community radio comes into existence through this process, there is a genuine sense of community ownership which would, in turn, influence most aspects of the operations of the station.

Often, however, community radio stations are established in a way that prevents them from being truly owned by community members. Such stations tend to be too closely associated with individuals who can be the founders. These 'proprietors' feel at liberty to do what they like with the radio and are often not prepared to involve other key players in the community in the project. Worst of all, "depending on how the process is handled, the result is sometimes one of bitterness and sadness from people who want to be part and parcel of the radio but feel excluded"(AMECEA- IMBISA, 1999). In this context, democracy involves first and foremost the "transparent exercise of power within a structure that guarantees the broadest possible form of public accountability" (Fairchild, 2001, p. 93). This implies that at the minimum level, the

community should elect the board of management of community radio periodically and that there should not be monopoly over the positions or portfolios. This is another principle which is proving to be an ideal as it is difficult to be implemented in practice by CR in Ghana. In almost all the stations that have been studied, there has not been any change in the Board of Directors and most community members do not even know the members of the boards who have been hand-picked by the founders of CR.

Whereas the management of CR are quick in noting that first and foremost giving voice to the voiceless is the raison d'être of their operations, a deep analysis of the processes, which are essential to carrying out that objective, seems muddied in the political economy of running CR. More than ninety percent of the interviewees understood democratic management and ownership of CR as the capacity of the radio station to give them information on issues relating to agriculture, education, health, culture, and politics and serving as a channel for them to make important social and public announcements. Some community members who clearly understand the concept of CR have expressed misgivings about its ownership and management.

The point worth noting is that when community ownership is questionable it can affect other aspects of the operation of community radio, especially democratic operation and community participatory processes which are fundamental to the viability and sustainability of CR. In a community in which people fully understand the concept of CR, it is not difficult to find volunteers who would like to offer their skills and talents to the radio station. This implies that creating the necessary environment for people to understand the philosophy and functions of CR and their participation in its operation can facilitate relevant dimensions of CR such as the role of dedicated, energetic, talented and volunteer producers of integrity in ensuring good programming. Though the volunteer producers interviewed indicated that they came to work at

the stations because they loved their communities and wanted to serve them, when deeper level questions were raised about how they could reconcile their disappointments with the low allowances given them and their spirit of voluntarism they seemed to be at a loss as to what to say.

However, what emerged as a possible way of addressing the challenge of how to engage, maintain and motivate a corps of volunteer producers as well as how to enhance volunteer staff's understanding of the principle of employment in CR was that the management of CR should have a policy to regularly offer in-service training programmes and other external training opportunities for them to upgrade their skills and knowledge in CR broadcasting. Heavy reliance on non-professional staff can compromise quality. It was observed that funding was a challenge to CR. Since the majority of listeners of CR in Ghana are the poor illiterate segment of the population, they find it difficult to contribute money to support the running of the station, even if they were to fully understand that such financial support was expected of them as owners of the CR. Despite their poverty, these communities are nevertheless often willing to volunteer labour when called upon.

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