

Country report on Community/local media in Zambia

Fidelis H. Muzyamba, Lecturer, University of Zambia Department of Mass Communication, Monday, 08 June 2009

ABSTRACT

The report is a descriptive treatment of the growth and experience of community mass media in Zambia. It traces the development of modern community media from the birth of the industry at the turn of the millennium to the present.

The community media sector has, during the decade or so of existence in Zambia, shown promise and risen to a position of eminence as champions of press freedom and communication empowerment at the grass roots level in communities where they operate. However, the industry has also shown notable weaknesses, which need timely intervention if the industry is to become sustainable.

INTRODUCTION- FROM AUTHORITARIAN TO LIBERAL MEDIA EXPERIENCE IN ZAMBIA

The last two decades have been among the most momentous in the mass media history of Zambia. Firstly, in 1991, we had the decision by the new Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) government to make good its pre-election promise to liberalise the mass media scene. The government fulfilled the promise by lifting the restrictions on broadcasting which had hitherto been the preserve of government. Accordingly, new broadcasters led by Radio Phoenix in 1994, started new stations. The struggle to stop the one-party rule of the last decades of Kenneth Kaunda's government had spawned strange alliances as all shades of trade unionists, politicians, teachers, and even journalists, came together to work for political, economic and social change.

A second impetus was the realisation by scholars and donors on the global scene that conventional mainstream media were not making their expected contribution to the attainment of development goals as expected. Some even blamed the lack of progress, and in some cases retrogression, to the use of conventional mass media. The "lost decades" of development have partly been blamed on conventional mass media which were based in main cities, and quite incapable of addressing the numerous problems faced around a country such as Zambia. Of course, the reasons for underdevelopment or lack of development are more complex and multifaceted than that, but the argument holds some truth. Conventional media, which were largely based in the city of Lusaka, could not conceivably cover or focus sufficient attention upon the myriads of issues and problems facing the hundreds and thousands of communities in Zambia. The realisation led to a movement towards the popularisation of Community mass media. Towards the end of the 1990s, invitations were made to Zambians to go for courses in community mass media journalism, and arrangements soon entered to set up community media. The combination of the efforts of independent media was soon having a notable impact on the governance of the country.

In April 2009, came the admission by outspoken ruling party member and Minister of Works and Supply, Mike Mulongoti that in Zambia, there now existed rule by non-governmental organisations, "strange journalists," and government. It was significant that a leader had felt the intrusion into what had previously been their monopoly terrain, and he was now publicly complaining over the fact. Although the minister may have possibly meant the statement in connection with one media organisation, it was to this author, a rare public affirmation of the workings of the concept of "fourth estate" being at work in

Zambia. This concept sees the mass media as a special, and relevant, though separate and independent fourth part in governance –after the triumvirate of the executive, the judiciary, and legislature. As Philosopher Edmund Burke once remarked in reference to the press:

“There were three Estates in Parliament, but in the Reporters Gallery yonder, there sat a Fourth more important far than they all.” (Quoted by Thomas Carlyle, 1841)

DEFINITION OF COMMUNITY MEDIA

Community mass media are media on a relatively small scale, owned by the community for coverage of the community, using participatory, democratic governance structures, which are gender-sensitive, and use local languages in their work. This definition is in line with a number of efforts by:

- i) The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC),
- ii) Media Network of the Netherlands (2006)
- iii) The Catholic Media Council (CAMECO),
- iv) Panos

v) Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and;

iv) The African Charter on Broadcasting of 2002.

The charter was approved by the African Union in Maputo in 2003, and envisages a three-tier system for the growth of broadcasting in Africa: a) Public, b) Private and c) Community stations.

The charter states that all state broadcasters should convert into public corporations.

Community may refer, either to a community of interest, or a geographical community.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNITY MEDIA IN ZAMBIA

In Zambia, we have community media serving both communities of interest and geographical communities. For example, although farmers are scattered around the country’s rural areas, a community magazine called *The Zambian Farmer* serves them with information and news about their sector. However, most of the community media in Zambia serve communities defined by geographical locality.

Further, most of the community media in Zambia are radio stations, but there some representation of print media (we have newspapers, a newsletter and a magazine), but no community television as of 2009 June. Out of the 32 or so registered community media, only 6 or one fifth are print (see tables at the end of the paper).

In terms of origination, the community media sector has a mixture of church, and non-church initiated media, but nearly half were established with church involvement. This is hardly surprising in view of the church’s strong desire to make a difference in both the spiritual and material well-being of the subjects.

Another critical feature is very rapid growth in the number of community media. Within 10 years from inception, Zambia has over 30 community mass media. The number of community media in the country keeps rising, and even at the time of the June 2009 workshop, some community media are being planned or being born. For example, this writer is aware that a there are plans for a community radio station in Mpika town in Northern Province. The medium should, among other things, help provide effective extension services and other communications to help in the growth and sustenance of the new palm oil industry taking root there, as well as the people-centred game management scheme in the district. Indeed, during the first week of June, 2006, the Zambia Communications Authority announced

an increase in available spectrum space on the Frequency Modulation (FM) band in order to cater for demand.

The majority of community media are, generally, sufficiently equipped to function, but typically, they tend to be without backup transmitter, spare control console, sufficient computers, standby generator, etc. Further, usually, at such media, there are no viable, sustainable plans for replacement of equipment. Consequently, a breakdown of one major component usually means closing down the medium, until money is found to buy replacements. After such breakdowns, the gap in transmission could span weeks, or even months. Among the community media, which were in the recent past hit by such breakdowns and shutdowns, is Radio Lyambai, and UNZA Radio. Efforts are being made to overcome this serious handicap through fund-raising for recapitalisation, better planning, management and implementation of more self-sustaining approaches.

BENEFITS OF UNFETTERED MEDIA

Although it is difficult to measure, or quantify the social and other benefits of community media (AMARC, 2007: 8), in Zambia, there is strong evidence from end-users that these have been considerable.

Community media now provide a new avenue for debate, good governance, and gender equity.

Through radio listeners' clubs and other participatory or interactive communication such as phone-ins, leaders are more rigorously made accountable for their actions and the use of public resources. This was not possible through mainstream conventional media owing to the vastness of the country and large number of communities. Members of Parliament, Ministers, and other leaders, now have to work harder to meet the needs of communities, as these demand accountability and transparency.

Through community media, people in the communities are now able to debate whether, for example, they want to buy a ferry from constituency development funds or sink a borehole. The voice of women is also now increasingly heard. For example, the women of Mazabuka now have a powerful voice that was able to demand that government to introduce literacy classes for adults in a poor area called Ndeke (Musanshi, 2004). Techniques and avenues used to give a "voice to the voiceless" include listeners clubs, discussion, voice recording question and answer sessions with leaders, interactive programmes, e.g. those with phone-ins, listeners also being reporters, etc.

Growth of community and cooperative spirit

Increasingly, one sees, through community mass media, people learning to work together through clubs and cooperatives. Radio Chikaya has, for example, helped spread knowledge of wildlife conservation, and new farming methods so that the community benefits (COMACO, 2006).

Closing the knowledge and information gap with a new breeze of independent grassroots news as the old professional journalist gatekeepers find new competition in the unrestrained community news approach. The community media are mitigating and fighting the effects predicted by the Knowledge

Gap hypothesis by Tichenor, Donohue and Olien that the educated with their access to technology, knowledge, and information become richer and better off, while the lot of the poor lose out. They provide a credible means to close the gap as people learn new agricultural techniques such as conservation farming, crop rotation, as well as marketing strategies for their produce (e.g. Radio Chikaya and Radio Chikuni are doing quite a lot of this non-formal educational work).

Avenue for sharing information about better health practices

Community media have helped spread the messages of how to deal with the biggest killer disease in Zambia – Malaria, and other diseases such as HIV/ AIDS and cholera.

Pillars of press freedom

Zambia has seen fierce struggles by community media for editorial independence. For example, Radio Explorers in Petauke (MISA, 2007), and Radio Icengelo in Kitwe permitted opposition leader Mr. Michael Sata airtime even in the face of government opposition. The latter did this several times over the years. Indeed, it has sometimes been these community media, which, despite their problems, have acted as guardians of independent thinking and action.

Technical empowerment for people at the community grassroots

Community media provide empowerment for people at the grassroots level through imparting knowledge, attitudes and skills of handling media equipment, as well as media production expertise. Thereafter, it is possible to truly claim that community media are by, and for the community.

Platform for participatory communication

Community media have made a unique contribution to participatory communication involving ordinary citizens. This is being done, for example, through radio listeners' clubs, such as the ones run by Radio Mazabuka and Radio Chikuni, to ensure that there is effective communication involving communities as they seek to solve their problems. Members of community mass media in Zambia also participate through other ways such as letters to the editor/ broadcaster, annual general meetings, and being volunteer journalists/ producers for the community mass media etc.

Avenue for cultural revival and promotion

Indigenous languages, art, traditional music, dress and other aspects of culture previously largely ignored, or that were difficult to accommodate in national media are now being catered for through community mass media. Radio Chikuni now hosts an annual, mainly music cultural festival in the community to which they broadcast. The Zambia National Broadcast Corporation can only cater for seven indigenous languages and English – out of the 73 or so available tongues. Change agents are also using community media to encourage communities **to reject negative cultural traits**, e.g. marrying off under-age girls, property grabbing, dispossession of children and widows by relatives when a husband dies, and polygamy (believed to be a factor in the spread of HIV/ AIDS).

PROBLEMS AFFECTING THE SECTOR

The PANOS 2006 study (Muzyamba, F. and Nyondo, R.) identified poor staffing as a vexing problem for community media. One third did of community media not have a trained producer/ editor, one third of the stations did not have a single trained announcer, and nearly half of the radio stations did not have a trained newscaster (ibid.). Only one community media organisation had personnel trained in research/ writing work. Four did not have a single trained Reporter, and 78.6 percent did not have a single trained sub-editor (ibid.).

In the absence of a cadre of trained journalists, one sometimes sees a casual, rather uninformed approach to journalism by some community media. For instance, though not exclusively the fault of community media alone, there has been a tendency towards the “horse-race effect,” with reporters sometimes being hijacked by partial election results, and concentrating on the leading candidate. This could be seen in 2001 and 2006 presidential, parliamentary and local government elections, as well as the October 2008 vote after the death of former President Levy Mwanawasa.

There have also been accusations that community media carry un-moderated, divisive, populist phone-in programming. Radio Lyambai, a privately initiated radio station with considerable community ownership was in December 2007 criticised by Zambia’s Ministry of information and Broadcasting Services (MIBS) for this kind of problem. They were accused in a letter from the ministry of “becoming a platform for confrontation, controversies and a channel of insults and misinformation,” and henceforth banned by government from broadcasting phone-in programmes. The independent media organisation, MISA-Zambia condemned the government action as excessive. Henry Kabwe, the Chairman the action as “authoritarian, an assault on media freedom and freedom of expression, and contrary to democratic norms.” He urged the MIBS to rescind its decision. However, the ban was upheld, and continued into 2009.

Admittedly, participatory media content may be sometimes be populist. The problem is that if broadcast content, particularly phone-ins, are aired without moderation, we sometimes end up with a mixture of truths, untruths, insults, rumours, misinformation, and the like. Clearly, this uninformed approach is the opposite of good journalistic practice, although government should also never find excuses to interfere with mass media work.

Radio Icengelo in Ndola recently had its Station Manager, Frank Bwalya removed by Bishop Noel O’regan of his diocese on grounds that he had, among other things, become “divisive.” The former manager had, despite his commitment to journalism, allowed himself excessive liberties and veered to an extreme anti-government, partisan stance. While still heading the radio station, he even announced formation of an opposition movement by led by him - even before he had legally had it registered. The problem with such incidents is that, sometimes, people sometimes fail to distinguish between individuals and the media they represent. Some of the attacks against Frank Bwalya ended up targeting community mass media in general. The former priest later went on the “suspend” himself from pastoral duties.

Other problems seen in the work of Zambia's community mass media include the tendency towards a DJ culture and excessive pop music offerings, poor news writing and editing, as well as poor technical quality (from lack of good training, lack of replacement policy and means for making replacements for equipment) (Muzyamba, F. and Nyondo, R. 2006).

As the 2006 Panos Needs study (ibid.) of community media in Zambia revealed, the sector needs direction, purpose, and funding. Unfortunately, Zambian community media had, in the early years, a tendency to be somewhat unassertive to the extent where their umbrella body – the Zambia Community Media Forum (ZACOMEF) - was, for some time, chaired by the owner of a commercial radio station who had interest in community coverage. To establish direction, purpose and make its mark on the mass media scene, the sector has to show more willingness to take charge of its own affairs.

Additional problems include the fact that Zambia's legislative and regulatory framework also does not specifically address community media, their situation, and needs, save for a brief mention in the Independent Broadcast Authority (IBA) Act of 2002 (ibid.). Zambia also does not yet have a Freedom of Information Act thereby making it hard for reporters to get information they need especially if misdeeds of government officials are involved (ibid.). Further, the lack of a considerable community print media presence in the sector is a worry. Print media have a unique role to play in development and literacy, particularly in a country like Zambia where, from the 1980s or so, one sees a poor reading culture. The causes seem to, at least partially, lie in the generally high poverty levels (ibid.) from that time into the 2000s. Without print media, the audience do not have within reach, a ready source of printed material for reference on matters they may learn from radio.

Other problems highlighted in the Panos study (ibid.) included: poor economic base (and lack of economies of scope), lack of back-up equipment such as power generator and transmitters, untrained staff, poor work ethics and negative attitudes on the part of volunteers. Others were duplicity in channels and fee payments to both the Communication Authority & Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, absence of legislation and acceptable regulations specifically for community mass media, lack of sufficient finances for sustainability of media, lack of knowledge of fund-raising and marketing strategies and inadequate managerial capacity to fully exploit the potential of their media (ibid.). Others were location of some stations in economically depressed areas (a problem that might have been avoided if careful baseline and market studies had been conducted so that, for example, a nearby source of advertising revenue might have been included in the catchment of a medium), and lack of access to media equipment donations to government (ibid.). Failure to stay up-to-date with changes in mass media technology and lack of capacity to sustain equipment etc., delays in issuing licences, lack of transport resources were also cited as problems (ibid.).

RELATIONS WITH GOVERNMENT

The reaction of government to the arrival of modern community mass media has been somewhat mixed. Reference has already been made to the bold move by government to liberalise the airwaves after the 1991 elections. The mass media sector also had positive encouragement whenever licenses have been granted, and spectrum space created for the establishment of new community media.

The year 2002 saw momentous leaps with the enactment by parliament of the Independent Broadcast Authority (IBA) Act, which introduced the idea of self-management for the independent media sector,

and the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) Amendment Act, which took away the power of the Minister of Information to control the broadcast industry, and ZNBC. ZNBC, at least officially, became a public corporation. 2008 also saw another positive development: the introduction of government support for the media fund, which the media fraternity had for long lobbied.

However, sometimes there have been some negative relations also. One problem has been the use of extra-legal tactics to muzzle the press. In January 2001, the dismissal by the government District Administrator (DA) of the 15 board members of Radio Chikaya, an independent community broadcaster, was clearly in breach of the country's constitution. The DA does not have any such powers as he claimed to have, and gladly, the decision was later reversed.

Occasionally, even in the last two years or so before the workshop, the Minister of Information and Broadcasting Services has warned community media not to air political broadcasts, which he/ she has argued is contrary to license terms for community media. This has left people wondering precisely what the government had in mind because politics is at the heart of many issues and events in society. Scholars and media representatives have complained that this is an attempt to muzzle community media.

Zambia also witnessed the introduction of ad hoc regulations apparently to stifle the new media: e.g. the payment of K40,000,000 Kwacha for all new stations, as well as having to make payments to cover the costs of inspections by government officers (Muzyamba, F, and Nyondo, R.). The introduction of such ad hoc regulations is contrary to the spirit and letter of the IBA (2002) and the ZNBC (Amendment) Act (2002) discussed earlier. The former states that there shall be self-management and regulation for the independent media sector, while the latter took away the power of the Minister of government from dictating to, or running the broadcast industry.

The government of Zambia was, during the early part of 2009, on the verge of introducing compulsory media registration for all practitioners. This was to encourage a situation where only qualified practitioners and ethical journalism would get through. However, the voice in favour of self-regulation appears to have prevailed, at least thus far.

The Panos study referred to earlier also alluded to a fear of “vulnerability to sabotage and intimidation by powers that be” and, in one case, there was claim of power outages in a station when airing material critical of government (Muzyamba, F. and Nyondo, R.).

Overall, it is hoped that there shall be a realisation soon enough that community media constitute, perhaps one of government's and donors' biggest allies in the battle against disease, poverty, illiteracy, and other vices. Government support for community mass media is therefore desirable.

CONCLUSION

The community media sector in Zambia is growing rapidly. It has achieved many successes, but is also experiencing problems that require attention. These include endogenous problems such as the lack of back-up equipment, and sufficient training for editorial and other staff for quality output and self-sustainability. The reporting staff are mainly volunteers who need initiation and upgrading to get to

acceptable standards. This is a critical issue since, there is also a high turnover of staff, as those who are trained, sooner or later, go away for greener pastures (ibid.) Other problems are exogenous to the media themselves, e.g. the need for government to introduce a Freedom of Information Act, and implement the IBA (2002) and ZNBC (Amendment) (2002) Act.

Table 1. Inventory of community mass media in Zambia

MEDIUM	LOCATION	OWNERSHIP/ TYPE
1. Kwacha Kumawa (Print)	Chipata, Eastern Province	Community
2. Community Voice (Print)	Lusaka, Lusaka Province	Community
3. Mazabuka Times (print)	Southern Province. Mazabuka	Community
4. People's Voice (print)	Southern Province, Livingstone	Community
5. Livingstone Today (print)	Southern Province, Livingstone	Community
6. The Zambian Farmer (print)	Lusaka, Lusaka province	Community
7. Petauke Explorers Radio	Petauke, Eastern Province	Private/ Community
8. Mazabuka FM (Radio)	Mazabuka, Southern Province	Community
9. Radio Chikaya	Lundazi, Eastern Province	Community
10. Radio Lyambai	Mongu, Western Province	Community
11. Pasmе Community Radio	Petauke, Eastern Province	Community
12. Radio Mpangwe	Katete, Eastern Province	Community
13. Mkushi Community Radio	Mkushi, Central Province	Community
14. Solwezi Community Radio	Solwezi, North Western Province	Church /Community
15. Icengelo (Radio)	Kitwe, Copperbelt Province	Church /Community
16. Yatsani (Radio)	Lusaka, Lusaka Province	Church /Community
17. Christian Voice (Radio)	Lusaka, but broadcasting to Southern & Eastern	Church /Community
18. Radio Chikuni	Chisekesi, Southern Province	Church /Community
19. Radio Maria	Chipata, Eastern Province	Church /Community
20. Oblates Liseli (Radio)	Mongu, Western Province	Church /Community
21. Mosi-oa-Tunya (Radio)	Livingstone, Southern Province	Church /Community
22. Yangeni Radio	Mansa, Luapula Province	Church /Community
23. Trinity Radio	Chipata, Eastern Province	Church /Community
24. Lutanda Radio	Kasama, Northern Province	Community
25. Radio Mano	Kasama, Northern Province	Community
26. Maranatha Radio	Kabwe, Central Province	Church Community
27. UNZA Radio	Lusaka, Lusaka Province	Community/ Teaching
28. Hone FM	Lusaka, Lusaka Province	Community/ Teaching
29. Mumbwa Radio	Central, Mumbwa	Community
30. Radio Titemwe	North-Western province, Solwezi	Church/ Community??????????????
31. Radio FCC	North-Western province, Solwezi	Community/ Church
32. Lusaka Star (print)	Lusaka province, Lusaka	Teaching/ community

Adapted and developed from Muzyamba, F. and Nyondo, R, 2006.

Table 2. Commercial media affiliated to the Zambia Community Media Forum (ZaCoMeF)

Media	Location	Ownership/ type
1. Radio Phoenix	Lusaka, Lusaka Province	Private
2. Choice FM	Lusaka, Lusaka Province	Private
3. Q FM	Lusaka, Lusaka Province	Private
4. Breeze FM	Chipata, Eastern Province	Private
5. Sky FM	Monze, Southern Province	Private
6. 5 FM	Lusaka, Lusaka Province	Private
7. Zambezi FM	Livingstone, Southern Province	Private
8. The Southern Guardian	Livingstone, Southern Province	Private

Table 3. Other Commercial Media

Media		Ownership
1. Muvi TV	Lusaka, Lusaka Province	Private
2. Hot FM	Lusaka, Lusaka Province	Private
3. <i>The Post</i>	Lusaka, but circulating nationally	Private
4. <i>Monitor & Guardian</i>	Lusaka, Lusaka Province	Private

Adapted from Muzyamba, F. and Nyondo, R, 2006.

Table 4. Government/ Public-owned Mass Media *

Media	Location	Ownership
1. ZNBC Radio 1, 2, & 4	Lusaka, but broadcasting nationally	Government, though supposed to be public corporation –ZNBC Amendment Act 2002
2. ZNBC TV	Lusaka, but broadcasting nationally	Government, though supposed to be public corporation ZNBC Amendment Act 2002
3. <i>Times of Zambia & Sunday Times</i>	Lusaka, but circulating nationally	Government
4. <i>Zambia Daily Mail & Sunday Mail</i>	Lusaka, but circulating nationally	Government
5. Zambia News and Information Services (ZANIS)	Lusaka and all districts	Government

Adapted and developed from Muzyamba, F. and Nyondo, R, 2006.

*The radio and TV services of ZNBC are supposed to run by a public corporation since the passing of the ZNBC (Amendment) Act (2002) and IBA Act (2002). However, the government is yet to implement the two acts.

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