

# Advocacy Strategies and Approaches for Community Radio Development in Nigeria

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This case study reports on five years of advocacy for policy change in Nigeria to enable the establishment of community radio services. It has been included in the toolkit as an illustration of the challenges of campaigning for ICT policy change. At the time of writing there is still no community radio in Nigeria. A well-organised campaign, launched in 2003, has built a substantial civil society coalition and gained commitments of support from government, politicians, the broadcast regulator, civil society organisations and international development agencies. Yet the goal of the campaign remains elusive and the advocacy effort has required continuing renewal.

The case study highlights some lessons learned: the pace of change can be uneven and unpredictable; key decision makers in government may be replaced, requiring new relations to be established; commitments to change may not translate into action, particularly when they are not backed by political will; advocacy campaigns require sustained access to resources if they are to maintain consistent and effective pressure.

## **Introduction**

An advocacy programme called the Initiative on Building Community Radio in Nigeria was launched in Lagos in November 2003. Implemented within the framework of a continent-wide programme, Catalysing Access to ICTs in Africa (CATIA), it was a collaboration of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) and Panos Institute West Africa (PIWA) in partnership with a local civil society organisation, the Institute for Media and Society (IMS).

The initiative instituted a steering committee which articulated a plan of action and began the implementation of activities within the plan. A large participation base subsequently developed for the advocacy which has now been underway for more than five years.

## **Background**

Nigeria has faced significant development challenges. At independence in 1960, it had a population of 53 million, which increased to an estimated 137 million in 2003. In 2003, 60% of the population lived below the poverty line; 70% of Nigerians were engaged in agriculture, particularly of the subsistence type; 68% were literate; infant mortality stood at 70 deaths per 1,000 live births; and life expectancy at birth was 50 years.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are recognised worldwide as agents of development. They had made some strides in Nigeria, but in the specific case of radio, the environment was such that it could not deliver significant dividends for development.

The government (federal, regional, state) monopolised radio broadcasting for 62 years. A liberalisation programme legislated by the federal government in 1992 finally gave birth to a broadcasting regulatory body and the issuance of the first set of private broadcasting licences in 1994. By 2003, there were 113 radio broadcasting stations in Nigeria. Among these were 83 government-controlled and 30 commercial stations. There was no community radio station. All the existing radio stations were located in urban centres which were either administrative capitals or commercial locations. The programmes of the stations catered to the tastes of the populations in these centres (e.g., of government agencies, elites, etc.).

The broadcasting environment as defined in policy, legislation and regulation was also unfavourable. For example, the existing National Mass Communication Policy had such lofty broadcasting sector objectives as: disseminating information to enhance the welfare of the people in all aspects of life; providing efficient broadcasting service to the entire people of the country; ensuring broadcast programmes were used to mobilise the rural populations for national development and improving the quality of their lives; and providing regular channels of communication between the government and the people. But in its implementation strategy, it affirms government monopoly of the broadcasting sector, saying "the time is however not yet ripe for private ownership of the (broadcast) media."<sup>1</sup>

The broadcasting law – National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Act 38 of 1992 (as amended in 1999) – broke this monopoly, but eleven years later the government had not reviewed the National Mass Communication Policy. In addition, the law creates a regulatory body which is a government parastatal, lacking independence and full regulatory powers. It is no more than a post office, because it is empowered to process broadcasting licence applications and forward them to the president of the country through the information minister. Authorisation of licences is at the president's discretion. The regulator's governing body is government-appointed and lacks security of tenure. It must implement any directive issued it by the information minister.

The law also has a mercantilist orientation. In the application form for a licence, for example, an applicant is required to provide details of shareholders and shareholding. This builds the impression that every potential licence applicant must be a commercial organisation.

At the regulatory level, in its third edition published in 2002, the Nigerian Broadcasting Code (the key instrument of the regulator, NBC) made limited provision for community broadcasting. However, it had very high fees in place. Licence fees were in three categories:

- Category A, for locations in the highly commercial centres like Lagos and Rivers states as well as the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), was NGN 20 million (USD 171,000)
- Category B, for locations in the less highly commercial states like Delta, Oyo and Sokoto, was NGN 15 million (USD 128,000)
- Category C, for all other locations in the country, was NGN 10 million (USD 85,000).

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Republic of Nigeria *National Mass Communication Policy* (Abuja: Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1990), 11

These fees were for the five-year lifespan of a licence and renewal was for the same amount. In addition, every radio station was required to pay to the NBC 2.5% of its gross turnover as annual charges.

The fees have not changed, but there are now two categories. Category A remains the same but Category B now covers all other parts of the country. The fees for both remain the same. A special licence fee of NGN 10 million (USD 8,500) has been created for campus radio stations (stations in educational institutions such as universities and polytechnics). Nine of these have been licensed so far. Rural/community stations are yet to be licensed, and the regulatory body has not announced what the fee would be when licensing starts.

It is fair to say that rural Nigeria is grossly underserved by existing radio stations. From policy to legislation and regulation, the odds were stacked against giving voice to the marginalised sections of the country.

The organisations collaborating on the Initiative on Building Community Radio in Nigeria were convinced that radio was a key tool in addressing the country's development challenges and giving voice to the voiceless, and that this required a free, independent and plural radio broadcasting landscape. This could only be achieved through a carefully articulated and patiently implemented strategy.

## **Strategy and approach**

The programme took off in November 2003 following the articulation of a plan of action by the steering committee. A concept paper was developed on the state of the radio broadcasting landscape and the prospective space for community radio in Nigeria.

This was followed by a series of awareness seminars conducted in four locations across the country (Ibadan, South-West; Bauchi, North-East; Enugu, South-East; and Kaduna, North-West). The seminars brought together civil society, community-based and grassroots organisations, media and media-related organisations, academia, policy makers, legislators and regulators as well as international development institutions.

These regional seminars were designed to sensitise stakeholders and generate further strategies for the development of the community radio sector in Nigeria. They were capped with an April 2005 national validation conference which brought together participants of the regional seminars along with newly discovered groups. The conference deliberated on and validated the statements of the regional seminars. It produced such outcomes as a new governance structure through the formation of the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition and a new action plan.

This second action plan continued to focus on sectoral engagement of stakeholder constituencies such as government executive agencies, national parliament, regulatory agencies, media, academia/research and training institutions, and international development agencies, among others. A second leg of the plan concentrated on empowerment and capacity building for selected grassroots communities for the development and establishment of pilot radio stations.

In August 2005 there was a high-level World Bank mission to the country. The meetings held enabled the mission and stakeholders in the country to reach a common appreciation of the urgent need for community radio in Nigerian communities, as well as strategies for addressing the realities of the Nigerian environment. The immediate dividend was a follow-up mission in May 2006 during which World Bank specialists interacted again with stakeholder groups and rural communities in different parts of the country.

In December 2005, a roundtable brought together representatives of the media to design strategies for media engagement in the process. In April 2006 six Nigerian journalists were sponsored to visit community stations in such countries as Mali, Ghana, Benin, Niger and Liberia. They returned to educate Nigerians, including policy makers, on the benefits and contributions of community radio to society.

To give further momentum, a high-level community radio policy dialogue which twinned with an AMARC regional roundtable was held in July 2006. Participating in the programme were community radio stakeholder groups, representatives of the World Bank, and policy, legislative and regulatory organs of the government. Significantly, key government officials expressed support for community radio advocacy, pledging various forms of commitment to the community radio development process. The information minister promised further consultation with the community radio stakeholders and the establishment of a committee to draft a workable community radio policy for the country. He followed this up by establishing a seventeen-member policy drafting committee which submitted its report in December 2006.

The community radio policy process was another opportunity seized to make inputs into government policy reform. Members personally addressed the committee and sent to it briefing notes and other forms of support literature. Previously, in 2004, advocates had developed and sent a memorandum to the government committee on the review of the old National Mass Communication Policy. They followed up with further comments when the government asked for more public inputs into the report of the committee in early 2005. The group also submitted a contribution to the work of the committee set up by the government to develop a National Frequency Spectrum Management Policy in 2006.

The programme has a research and communication strategy to help drive forward the advocacy campaign. For example, a statement is issued following every event and is widely circulated to the media; policy, legislative and regulatory agencies; international development groups; and other stakeholder constituencies. An electronic mailing list which connects community radio stakeholders and a website were launched in 2004 and 2005 respectively. They continue to serve as discussion and information-sharing forums. Materials in print formats such as books, booklets and pamphlets have been published and their dissemination is ongoing. Among these is a "Stakeholders' Charter", a publication which contains an analysis of the Nigerian broadcasting landscape and a package of advocates' demands for reform. Two studies<sup>2</sup> provided insights into the challenges and prospects of community radio as well as strategies for engaging its development in Nigeria. Members of the community radio coalition also participate in media appearances such as TV discussions from time to time.

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<sup>2</sup> IMS and Panos Survey on Design of Model Community Radio for Nigeria (2005) and Ayo Ojebode and Tunde Adegbola *Engaging Development: Environment and Content of Radio Broadcasting in Nigeria* (2007)

Meanwhile, an evaluation exercise was launched in March 2007 to assess the advocacy work since its take-off in November 2003. The evaluation returned a positive verdict on the work and commitment of advocates to the process. The recommendations included the development of a new action plan with which to carry the work forward; a more active engagement of the media; the promotion of innovative partnerships such as with the business sector; and capacity building for rural communities preparing to establish radio stations.

## **Impact and outcomes**

The advocacy programme has produced outcomes which are evidence of positive transformation in the country's broadcasting landscape in favour of community radio development. Among these outcomes are:

- (a) The development of a strong participation base. In 2003 the steering committee consisted of only eleven individuals. Today, there are at least 200 institutional and individual members who spread the message of community radio in all regions of the country. The Community Radio Coalition has also given advocates a loud and uniform voice which resonates in government and other circles.
- (b) The development of a high level of understanding of the benefits of community radio in various stakeholder constituencies including grassroots communities. The upsurge in the interest by communities to establish radio stations has largely informed the decision by the Community Radio Coalition to assist the implementation of twelve pilot stations across the country. The process to establish three stations is currently ongoing.
- (c) Positive responses from government agencies:
  - From 2004 to 2006, the government instituted three policy processes: a review of the old National Mass Communication Policy; design of a National Community Radio Policy; and a National Frequency Spectrum Management Policy.
  - The regulatory body, NBC, reviewed its Broadcasting Code to provide wide space for community broadcasting. A new edition of the code published in 2006 devotes a full chapter to community broadcasting. This chapter articulates the types of communities eligible for community radio ownership, funding sources, mode of participation by community members, and languages of broadcast, among other issues.
  - Members of the two chambers of the federal parliament as well as their colleagues at the state level have expressed strong support for community radio and their readiness to facilitate legal reform in its favour.
- (d) Support by international development agencies. Beyond the support for advocacy, international groups have also expressed, and are beginning to actualise, commitment to support the establishment of radio stations in pilot communities.

## **Challenges and lessons**

The advocacy programme has met challenges and learned valuable lessons:

- Government agencies have different levels of understanding of, and commitment to, community radio issues. Currently the regulatory body shows better commitment to community radio development than policy and legislative bodies.  
*Lesson:* The pace of agencies in responding to advocacy cannot be taken for granted.
- There is a high turnover of key officials in policy-making positions. For example, the Information Ministry which handles broadcasting policy issues has had five ministers since the return of democratic rule in 1999 and three since the community radio advocacy was launched in 2003.  
*Lesson:* Advocates should be ready to deal with a series of officials before reaching their goal.
- The speed of the government's policy machinery has been worrisome to community radio stakeholders. The three policy processes which the government initiated in 2004 and 2006 have still not been concluded.  
*Lesson:* Never assume that the speed with which government begins a process will remain constant or that initial government enthusiasm signifies any strong political will. A process which is launched with much enthusiasm might slow down mid-stream.
- There is evidence of inconsistency in the government's handling of policy development and implementation. In 2006, the government announced that community radio licences would be issued after a community radio policy was produced. However, while the community radio policy process was still to be concluded, it licensed radio stations in educational institutions and began to categorise them as community stations. The understanding it had with stakeholders was for grassroots community radio, where no licence approval has yet been given.  
*Lesson:* Actions of government agencies may not be faithful to agreements reached in engagements with stakeholders.
- The government has not shown much interest in legal reform. It presented the NBC Act (the broadcasting law) to parliament for review in 2001. The parliament did not pass the review into law, but the government (executive) has not re-presented the document to the new parliament.  
*Lesson:* Government action can be half-hearted. If it slows down and there is no force to activate it, it can stall.
- Funding support has been inadequate. This has led to the inability of advocates to conclude activities or conduct them on the scale they would have wished. For example, the four awareness seminars with which the advocacy began in 2003 were considered too few for a country with a population close to 140 million people.  
*Lesson:* Funding is key to smooth running of a well-packaged advocacy programme.

## **The way forward**

The Community Radio Coalition plans to move its work forward by engaging with the processes for concluding the policy processes; building capacity of communities to establish radio stations; and, in the medium term, legal reform.

The Coalition, under its new plan, wants advocacy activities to target executive, legislative and regulatory organs of government and the media. The plan also provides for continuing awareness raising for institutions which are close to the grassroots. These include community development agencies, traditional chiefs and other community leaders.