

Development of radio in african countries



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Essay: The Development of radio in African countries, including South Africa

Radio is the most important medium in Africa. Its Flexibility, low costs, and oral character meet Africa's situation very well. It remains the top medium in terms of the number of people that it reaches (Mytton).

Radio is the fundamental mass-medium in Africa as it holds the widest reach and the highest audience numbers compared to television (TV), newspapers and other information and communication technologies (ICTs). Over the last 20 years radio has experiences a regeneration, due to democratisation and more affordable technology, today radio has proved to be far more hands-on and a straightforward type of communication then it possibly was in older times. Adding to the development is the welcoming of new technologies that have become available – this has evolved radio into more of a two-way medium, assisting in the bridge of the digital divide by providing information tools for access to all audiences (Mytton).

Radio as a source of news and entertainment is completely unrestricted by the internet. One of the main developmental content encounters on African Radio is the need to produce programmes on a tight budget. The dominant principles of African radio is live broadcast, rather than arranged programmes (Myers, 2008). Future technologic trends seem to be enhancing rather than replacing radio. It is unlikely that TV will challenge radio as it is developing at a lower process then expected. “ At the level of international donor support, radio, which at one time was regarded at the ‘ poor cousin’ of

the newer ICTs, has been brought back into the ICT family, there is renewed interest at the policy level.” – (Myers, 2008).

There are four classes that radio stations can be divided into today, state-controlled public radio; privately owned commercial radio; community-controlled radio and international radio. Because a country’s media may be loosened does not mean that there are not huge stresses on press freedom and countless economic challenges met by broadcasters. Technology seems to be enhancing rather than replacing radio.

Radio is uniquely matched to the African context, being an aural and portable medium in a continent that is primarily non-literate (Myers, 2008).

The history of radio development emerged from three separate stages, beginning in 1924 when the first South African broadcasts took place. There was the colonial period, radio was the main medium which was brought in to serve the settlers and the welfares of the colonial powers. Later on the ruling classes introduced radio services presented by and for the indigenous people. The domestic broadcasting system of all European authorities such as the British independent public service model of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) or the French government radio stations were not government monopolies (Mytton).

The earliest broadcasting that appeared on the continent was in in South Africa. In Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, three organizations – an advertising group, a private dub, and a local authority; these organisations were granted licenses to broadcast. They all soon were taken over by an entrepreneur who, through difficulty, moved the stations toward commercial

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practicality. The government did not see this commercial practicality as a service they sought after – after inviting John Reith, the BBC's first director-general, to come to South Africa in 1934 to help them develop a national public service form of broadcasting thus the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) was created in 1936. SABC drifted from BBC's working mannerisms soon after its establishment. It was never far from the political influence and control which grew during the years of apartheid. For a large period the SABC programmes were dictated by white audiences until 1943, it only broadcasted in English and Africans, leaving the African audiences ignored. In the 1960's broadcasting for Africans extended when Radio Bantu was developed during apartheid to emphasise the apartheid ideology of the separation of the races (Mytton).

After World War 2 broadcasting expanded in most of the African colonies and became one of the official British policies, – radio services would be developed to educate and inform the African listeners. Torn Chalmers, a successful BBC radio producer who was involved in developing of the radio in Nigeria, Malawi, Zambia and Tanzania, along with others tried to separate broadcasting from government. In spite of the establishment of public corporation in several British regions, stations were closely managed by their corresponding governments and had little independence (Mytton).

The French developed a different policy, nearly all broadcasting in French regions were in the French language. Radio broadcasting to a large extent, originated in France through the Societe de Radio-diffusion de la France d'Outre-Mer (Society for Radio Transmission to French Overseas Territories – SORAFOM). It was not until the 1960's the decade when African colonies

were granted independence and allowed to establish national radio broadcasters (Mytton).

In most countries the national and regional radio represent the voice of the government. The main difference between state radios and independent radios are that state radios reach nation-wide and independent radio stations are confined to urban areas. Independent radios also have almost all been FM stations where as state radio stations are of various stations (Mytton). Community Radio has becoming a growing importance to the accessibility of information and a tool of empowerment for local communities across Africa, - they face several challenges with regard to sustainability. There is no certainty to the long-term future of this sector - despite it its growth in numerous countries. (MCgregor, 2006)

Independent radios stations can be catorgorised into five types. Fully commercial stations that seek to make a profit, religious radio stations - these stations are mostly supported by sponsors, the growth of commercial radio could change the weakness of many states that support the talented artist that have had to stop working because of inadequate payments - these artists find that they do better by marketing their own music at street vendors. Community radion stations which could be seen as the fastest growing sector - these stations are often staffed by volunteer helpers, run at low cost and sponsored from the outside. By 2000 there were over 70 radio stations in South Africa and more then 100 in West Africa. Community radio stations contribute to the national edication and development which is of major importance - there are many developmental agencies strongly favour the use of radio campaigns for better health, in the past these campaigns

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and advertisements were very dull however in recent years there has been a growth in the imaginative and entertaining use of the radio to encourage the development of these areas. The fourth and fifth categories each emerged as the result of ethnic or other struggles. Factional radio stations were used to promote a specific section in a struggle. This category was also referred to as the hate radio station. The fifth category, humanitarian radio stations, was a standing power to factional radio. Radio power in Africa led numerous aid agencies, including the United Nations, in support of the establishment of humanitarian radio stations that encourage peace, harmony and democracy. (Myers, 2008)

In the 21st century there have been many technological advances that have boosted broadcasting to new invisions of direct satellite broadcasting. Digital shortwave is the future of radio tansmissions and if Africa can employ this new technology it will revolutionize radio broadcasting over the whole African continent.

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