

IS COMMUNITY RADIO PROMOTING SOCIAL CHANGE IN MALAWI?



PHOTOGRAPH: COURTESY OF MISA BROADCASTING, WINDHOEK, NAMIBIA

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EXTRACT

This study explores the effectiveness of community radio as a medium for bringing about social change in Malawi.

It identifies several problem areas that are threatening the future of community radio broadcasting in the country. It provides a comparative analysis of operational strategies of community radio in neighbouring Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia that Malawi could draw lessons from.

This study argues for a reformation of the country's communications law and broadcasting policies for the development of a revitalized community radio broadcasting sector that would be an effective agent of social change, economic development and the promotion of democracy in Malawi.

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MAP OF MALAWI



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ABSTRACT: Chapter Outlines:

Chapter One begins with the question of this dissertation: Is community radio promoting social change in Malawi? The rationale and aims of this study are to explain the importance of community radio broadcasting in Malawi. This chapter defines social change and offers arguments on why community radio is important for Malawi, particularly to assist grassroots communities to participate in democracy and national development.

The chapter outlines research on community radio projects in the country, along with a discussion on existing laws and media policies. Details of the Malawi Communications Act (1998), the law which is used by the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority, MACRA, to regulate community radio stations and public and private broadcasters in Malawi are discussed. Activists in the social and human rights sectors are seeking to promote social change by coming up with initiatives on radio that reflect concerns of grassroots communities.

Concepts of 'alternative media' are examined as a framework for understanding the role of community radio. It also examines how the fledgling community broadcasting sector is facing serious difficulties that are hampering it in its task of promoting social change.

Chapter Two is a statement of the problem. It identifies several problem areas, ranging from lack of conceptualisation of community radio by government officials and planners to shortages of skilled staff and the poor state of technical equipment, to restrictive regulatory policies and out-dated draconian laws and state dominance that are combining to hold back community radio stations from fulfilling their role of empowering grassroots communities to help improve their well-being and participate in national development programmes.

Chapter Three provides a definition of community radio. This is important for several reasons. First, it clears up misconceptions about what it is. Secondly, it helps to emphasise that community radio is different from public and commercial radio. Thirdly, the definition helps to stress the democratic ownership and crucial process of access and participation that community radio provides in empowering its owners, the grassroots communities.

Such definition is important for countries like Malawi because many people apparently have no proper concept of community radio, or of its role as an agent for social change.

Chapter Four examines concepts of communication for development. It explores theories surrounding media and development to contextualise them with the aims of this study. The chapter also raises pertinent observations on the need for measurement and evaluation in order to test whether the communication processes are really as effective as they are assumed to be, particularly in the sector of development communication.

Chapter Five provides case studies of community radio broadcasters in Malawi. It examines the operations of three, out of five, community radio stations that are on air alongside other licensed broadcasters that are operating at the time of writing this study. The chapter also outlines several challenges that are facing the sector, including the issue of sustainability which is threatening the life of most of the stations. It also highlights the views of audiences as well as managers and staff of the community broadcasters.

Chapter Six focuses on community radio strategies in Malawi's neighbouring states: Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia. The strategies raise important issues such as ownership, training, financial partners, development of local content, and impact of community radio stations, that should be considered by those behind community radio initiatives. These could be considered as

examples of good community radio broadcasting practices that Malawi could learn from.

Chapter Seven concludes the arguments of this study. It calls on stakeholders, especially the Government of Malawi, to rethink on the policy on broadcasting to encourage initiatives for the establishment of more community radio stations in the country. The current policy and regulations are limiting the voices of the marginalised from being heard and are not reflective of the changed technological and political climate following the liberalization of the airwaves in this country a decade ago. A change of policy, particularly on community radio stations, will ensure greater participation of grassroots communities in the government's democracy and development objectives.

PREFACE

The Republic of Malawi, formerly known as Nyasaland, is a relatively small, landlocked country in southern Africa at the southern end of the East African Rift Valley. It shares borders with Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia. Malawi's land mass covers an area of about 118,484 square kilometers, although a fifth of this is accounted for by Lake Malawi.

The Malawi Central Statistical Office has projected the population to reach 13 million by the end of 2008. Just over half the population is women. Rapid population growth is creating land pressures in a country that is critically dependent on agriculture, which accounts for over 90% of exports and 40% of GDP.

Malawi gained independence from Britain in 1964, after 73 years of British rule. The prime minister at that time, Hastings Kamuzu Banda, was elected president for life in 1971 and established authoritarian, single-party rule. His reign ended in 1994, when he was defeated by Bakili Muluzi and his United Democratic Front, UDF, in the country's first multi-party elections. Muluzi and his UDF were re-elected in June 1999 but presided over a period of poor economic performance, including a severe drought in 2002.

The current president, Bingu wa Mutharika was elected in May 2004, after Muluzi failed to amend the constitution to enable him to stand for a third term in office. The president is head of government and state and presides over a 47-member cabinet. The legislature is unicameral, with 193 members elected for five-year terms. Various other political parties including the main opposition, the Malawi Congress Party, MCP, make up the parliament.

Malawi is divided into three administrative areas: Southern Region, Northern Region and Central Region and 29 districts. Malawi's capital city is Lilongwe in the Central Region. The Southern Region is home to Malawi's business centre, Blantyre, named after the birth place of the British missionary-explorer, David Livingstone.

Malawi has nine major language groups, namely: Chewa, Lomwe, Ngoni, Nkhonde, Mang'anja, Sena, Tonga, Tumbuka and Yao. The official languages are English and Chichewa.

One of the poorest countries in the world, Malawi ranks 164 out of the 177 countries measured in the 2008 Human Development Index, HDI, of the United Nations. Poverty is endemic and food shortages are quite common. Two in every three Malawians live below the national poverty line. The country faces one of the world's most intense HIV/AIDS crisis with almost one million people living with the disease. Life expectancy has fallen to about 46 years.

INTRODUCTION

This study explores the effectiveness of community radio as a medium for bringing about social change in Malawi. As a working definition, social change here is limited to an interactive process that enhances a community's capacity to solve its own problems, in which community dialogue and collective action work together to produce social change that improves the welfare of all its members (Grey-Felder, 2002). It is also defined as social empowerment that promotes independence and self determination and that facilitates people's participation in their communities (World Bank, 2008).

The thematic framework adopted here assumes that community radio can be utilised to bring about change by empowering grassroots communities to understand and participate in democratic deliberations and negotiations. It also assumes that they can be informed about and be encouraged to participate in government development programmes that are designed to pull them out of ignorance and grinding poverty. This is supported by the change that is being brought about by the World Bank through its Community Empowerment and Social Inclusion (CESI) learning programme. It aims to enable the poor and the excluded to shape their own development by looking at issues of empowerment and governance, making a crucial link in its recent analytical work to strengthen the voices of the poor in influencing public policies and make institutions more accountable and responsive to their needs.

This dissertation examines the operations of three community radio stations in Malawi: Dzimwe Community Radio in Mangochi; ABC Radio in Lilongwe, and Mudziwathu Community Radio in Mchinji. The three are representative of an initiative in Malawi towards community radio broadcasting.

This study draws from field research that included focus group discussions and extended interviews with audiences of the three stations, interviews with staff and observations in the field. It is also informed by the research of Kanyongolo, (2005), and Chirwa, (2006), on the community radio sector in Malawi. It identifies several problem areas that are threatening the future of community radio stations in the country. These range from poor conceptualisation of community radio and restrictive regulatory policies, to a real life struggle to survive.

There are only five community radio stations in a field of 23 broadcasters in Malawi at the time of writing this study. This study reflects problems expressed by managers, staff and audiences of three of these community radio stations. It also highlights concerns that Chirwa, (2006), and Kanyongolo, (2005), raise over laws regulating broadcasting in Malawi.

Alongside this locality, the study is informed by the literature of several scholars, among them Lewis, (2006), McQuail, (2005), Scannel, (1995), Servaes and Thomas, (2006), Sreberny-Mohammadi, (1997), and others, to contextualize theory of media and communication and to try to explain how mass communications affect society.

The study also provides a comparative analysis of operational strategies of community radio stations in Malawi's neighbouring states: Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia, as instructive lessons that authorities and policy managers in Malawi could learn from.

The study argues for a reformation of the country's communications law and broadcasting policies for the development of a revitalized community radio broadcasting sector that would be an effective agent of social change and economic development in Malawi.

Methodology

This dissertation was conceptualised as an academic research proposal for submission to the University of Leicester for the degree of MA (Mass Communications). The methodology used in this study is qualitative. It involved literature reviews of various studies and publications on community radio broadcasting and participatory communication; e-mail and face-to-face interviews with representatives of the three community radio stations; observations in the field and focus group discussions with audiences of the three stations, between August and September, 2008.

The qualitative technique, based on the advice of Wimmer and Dominic, (2003), is a useful mass media research tool because its limitations are recognized on small sample projects such as this one. Another advantage of qualitative research – as opposed to quantitative research which uses a static or standardized set of questions -- is that a researcher can change questions or ask follow-up questions at any time, even though a basic set of questions is designed to start the project (Mytton, 1999, p. 94). This was the experience during the field work.

In addition to the above points, the researcher was mindful of the practical advice offered by Hansen, Cottle, Negrine and Newbold, (1998), on issues of survey research, focus group interviewing, analysis and reporting.

This is an academic-sector research – as opposed to private-sector research - to explain community radio in Malawi and its effects on its grassroots audiences. Nonetheless, it was affected by the constraints of costs and time. For example, this study could only be conducted during a space of three months due to

submission deadlines. Limitations also had to be placed on costs of travel, accommodation, etc – constraints that are normally associated with private sector research.

CHAPTER ONE: Why Community Radio is important for Malawi

Community radio is generally seen as alternative, participatory media that extend the voices of groups and ideas otherwise not heard, as well as a means of the vibrancy of democratic society (Lewis, 2006, and Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, 1994). Community radio may be pictured as an agent that is used to bring about community empowerment. This is a process about people and government working together to make life better: it involves more people being able to influence decisions about their communities and more people taking responsibility for tackling local problems, rather than expecting others to (UK Government, (2008).

In other words, community radio provides space for debate and discussion as well as political participation. Blumler and Gurevitch, (2005, p.116), see this as an example of the 'public sphere' that was conceptualised by Habermas (1989), "as a space in which people can discuss civic issues on their merits without distortion by pressures of state or market institutions. This is put forward as an ideal, in light of which existing political communication arrangements can be criticized, their reform conceived, and certain priorities approximating the desired standards be welcomed."

¹ Especially since the translation into English in 1989 of Jurgen Habermas's book entitled *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), there has been much reference to the concept of a *public sphere* in speaking of the role of the mass media in political life (McQuail, 2005, p. 181). "In general the public sphere refers to a notional 'space' which provides a more or less autonomous and open arena or forum for public debate. Access to the space is free, and freedoms of assembly, association and expression are guaranteed. The 'space' lies between the 'basis' and the 'top' of society, and mediation takes place between the two." The basis, according to McQuail (2005), can also be considered to be the private sphere of the life of individual citizens, while the political institutions at the centre or top are part of the public life

The arguments and concepts outlined above are useful for measuring the role that community radio everywhere, should be playing. In the case of Malawi, as evidence gathered by this study demonstrates, community radio initiatives are playing a peripheral role in social discourse, and failing to provide space for democratic deliberation and negotiation.

This in turn raises serious questions – not just about this limited role of community radio in this country – but also about the philosophy, on one hand, of establishing institutions such as the Malawi Human Rights Commission, MHRC, to promote democracy in Malawi, yet on the other hand, denying such institutions the legal means of fulfilling their mandates.

Community radio broadcasting is particularly important for Malawi for several considerations. Firstly, it can be a forum or platform in the Habermasian concept to stimulate as many voices as possible of rural communities to debate freely or clarify issues that concern them. Secondly, it can actively demonstrate Malawi's commitment to provide structures that promote and improve democratic expression and practice. Thirdly, it can allow for the dissemination of information to millions of people who would not otherwise have access to information for their social needs and can work as a tool for social change. Lastly, it can provide an alternative perspective on the question of media and development.

Community radio is a vehicle that grassroots communities can use to express their opinions on issues of concern in their daily lives. This freedom of expression is guaranteed by the Constitution of Malawi which declares in section 34: "Every person shall have the right to freedom of opinion, including the right to hold opinions without interference, to hold, receive and impart opinions." Freedom of expression is also guaranteed under section 35, which states: "Every person shall have the right to freedom of expression." In support of this, section 36 of the Constitution declares: "The press shall have the right to report and publish freely, within Malawi and abroad, and to be accorded the fullest possible facilities for

access to public information.” The press in this context naturally includes community radio.

In practice, these rights are still theoretical. Community radios are not able to exercise such freedom because of restrictions imposed by the state-dominated regulator, MACRA. The state also controls the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, MBC, Radio 1 and 2, as well as Television Malawi, TVM. As a result, opposition political figures in Malawi regularly complain of bias against them by the state-controlled broadcasters. For example, Chihana, (2008, p. 2), says: “It is a fact that both MBC and TVM are very biased against the opposition and very pro-government in their coverage of news. The two state broadcasters create an image in their coverage that the opposition is evil, which is a threat to democracy.”

Secondly, community radio is supposed to demonstrate Malawi’s commitment to the promotion and strengthening of democratic expression and practice. Malawi is bound through its international obligations to promote the growth of media, including community radio. Malawi is a signatory to a number of international conventions, among them of the United Nations, the African Union and the Southern African Development Community, SADC. For example, section 17 (a) of the SADC Protocol on Culture, Information and Sport (2001), commits member states to the “promotion, establishment and growth of independent media, as well as free flow of information.” It adds on section 18 (4): “Member states agree to create a political and economic environment conducive to the growth of pluralistic media.” And section 20 of the Protocol goes on to call on member states to “take necessary measures to ensure the freedom and independence of the media.” All this, it could be reasonably argued, includes community radio stations.

These rights are also enshrined by the African Union, AU, Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (2002). This is regarded by media scholars as one of the most important and enlightened responses on media freedom on the African continent. It declares under section V (2) on broadcasting:

1. States shall encourage a diverse, independent private broadcasting sector. A state monopoly over broadcasting is not compatible with the right to freedom of expression.
2. The broadcast regulatory system shall encourage private and community broadcasting in accordance with the following principles:
 - there shall be equitable allocation of frequencies between private broadcasting uses, both commercial and community;
 - an independent regulatory body shall be responsible for issuing broadcasting licenses and for ensuring observance of license conditions; licensing processes shall be fair and transparent, and shall seek to promote diversity in broadcasting; and
 - community broadcasting shall be promoted given its potential to broaden access by poor and rural communities to the airwaves.

The Commission reaffirms its Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression as follows:

“1. Freedom of expression and information, including the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other form of communication, including across frontiers, is a fundamental and inalienable human right and an indispensable component of democracy.

“2. Everyone shall have an equal opportunity to exercise the right to freedom of expression and to access information without discrimination.”

A third and equally important consideration concerns the powerful role that radio is playing in disseminating information to millions of people who cannot read or write or afford television. According to Malawi's national population census report for 2006, the literacy rate in the country is less than 70% of the general population. Malawi, like other countries with high levels of poverty and low levels of education, relies on broadcasting to make sure that as many people as possible in this category are able access information they can use for their social needs. Community radio by natural extension of this broadcasting process is seen as ideal tool for social change.

Some of the virtues of radio compiled from the work of scholars of mass communication are summarized below. Radio is:

- Cost effective and reaches more disadvantaged communities who cannot afford TV and who cannot read and write, and
- Creates a sense of belonging, the 'we-feeling' of the community (Scannel and Cardiff, 1995, pp 3-9)
- Reaches almost anyone, everywhere, (Mytton, 1999, p 10)
- Powerful: the right combination of notes, words, emotion, sound effects and/or music evokes strong images that grab attention faster than visual media (Pringle and Starr, 1995. p 177).

Community radio broadcasting could be powerful in mobilising grassroots communities to participate in important national campaigns in Malawi. One example is the 'Call to Action'. This is an international effort to accelerate programmes on the Millenium Development Goals, MDGs, and help make 2008 a turning point in the fight against poverty (DFID, 2008). The MDGs include halving world poverty, putting all children to school and halving the number of people without access to water, all by 2015.

Community radio could also be used to replicate and boost in many districts of Malawi programmes like the Partnership in Capacity Building in Education, PACE. This programme was introduced in Malawi between 2003 and 2006 by the British development agency, DFID, with the collaboration of rural communities to successfully reverse a trend of school drop-outs by girls because of early marriages and pregnancies (DFID Report, 2008).

Communication, particularly through radio broadcasting, has been recognised as a crucial factor in bringing about the psychological and sociological foundations necessary for economic and democratic development (Liebes, 2005, p. 357). A practical example of this is radio programmes that are produced and aired by one of Malawi's commercial broadcasters, Capital FM, under the sponsorship of Democracy Consolidated Programme, DCP. The outcome is an "increased and more effective participation of communities in decision-making and in advocating changes to policies, laws and practices which affect their livelihoods and rights and holding public bodies accountable" (DCP,2008). The DCP is an institution that was established 10 years ago by the government of Malawi with funding from the United Nations Development Programme, UNDP. The DCP aims at promoting good governance and respect for human rights, especially the right to development, at grassroots level.

Another example is programming that is being produced by the Development Broadcasting Unit, DBU, to enable grassroots communities to reduce their poverty and improve their livelihoods. The DBU was established at the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation, MBC, with funding from the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The DBU has established more than 30 Radio Listening Clubs across the country, each of which assumes the role of facilitating development in their areas. The DBU is meant to provide access to all parts of Malawian society, with particular emphasis on the most marginalized. The programmes are also aired on Capital FM.

Community radio broadcasters could thus boost many development policies and projects in Malawi more effectively than other forms of mediated communication. One example of the Government's omission in using community radio to boost important development policy is Malawi's NAPA, (2006, pp. 1- 46), project report that spells out an 'urgent' need to respond to climate change and assist vulnerable rural communities.

The Malawi Government signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) that was held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992. It ratified the UNFCCC on 21st April 1994. Malawi developed a National Environmental Action Plan in 1994 as an operational tool against the threats caused by climate change, especially the adverse impacts of droughts and floods on the economy.

The loss of human, natural, financial, social and physical capital, caused by the adverse impacts of climate change, especially floods, drought and landslides, among many other natural disasters and calamities, is of great concern to the Malawi Government, as it strives to ensure sustainable livelihoods for all its citizens.

The primary objective of the NAPA was to identify and promote activities that address urgent and immediate needs for adapting to the adverse impacts of climate change among rural communities in vulnerable areas of the country, focusing initially on the adaptation needs in the agriculture, water, energy, fisheries, land use change and forestry, wildlife, human health and gender sectors.²

² Source: *Environment Affairs Department, Ministry of Mines, Natural Resources and Environment (2006)*.

The report notes on p. 13, that poverty in Malawi is widespread and deep, with 65 % of the population living below the poverty line of less than one US dollar a day. Over 85% of Malawians live in rural areas, with the majority depending on subsistence rain-fed agriculture, and relying on a single maize harvest for their livelihoods. As such, they are very vulnerable to climate-related natural calamities and disasters such as floods and droughts, which directly affect agricultural productivity. The integrated livelihood project would enhance people's capacity to cope with and adapt to these natural calamities in vulnerable areas.

The report however, makes no mention of a media campaign in the project. It states on p. 14: "This is a project that will require a multi-sectoral approach. The key sectors include agriculture, water, fisheries, wildlife and human health, and private sector organizations, including civil society, non governmental organizations (NGOs) and community based organizations (CBOs)." It makes no mention whatsoever of community radio.

Many development policies in Malawi contain sound procedures of evaluations, follow-ups and pledges that marginalised communities will be 'consulted'. They fail, however, to spell out the form of consultation. They make out no case for the use of communication strategies, particularly community radio. They fail to recognise how community radio can be used as a platform on which grassroots communities can discuss and debate with officials and planners so that they can understand policies better and thereby participate in the government's development policies.

Government officials and even their foreign development partners, it seems, are not fully aware of how they can use mass media, especially community radio, for effective communication strategies. Yet, as McQuail, (2005, p 490), argues, citing Katz et al., (1963): "Most evidence relates to the many attempts since the Second World War to harness mass media to campaigns for technical advance or for health and educational purposes in developing countries, often following

models developed in the rural United States.” A strong argument could therefore be made out for community radio to be used to achieve the primary objective of the NAPA .

In addition to the above arguments, and as previously mentioned, a fourth reason why community radio is important for Malawi is that it provides an alternative perspective on the question of media and development. This argument is developed further, under the theories of Communication for Development in Chapter Four.

What needs to be pointed out, however, is that the above arguments are not intended to romanticise the role of community radio in the democratisation process, or to offer it as a panacea for the problems of marginalised communities. Nonetheless, the role that community radio plays as an act of participation in communication and as democratically controlled radio, is widely recognised and well documented by several scholars, among them Hochheimer, (1993), Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, (1994), Tabing (2002), and Servaes and Thomas (2006).

What is also recognised is that research is needed to test many of the assumptions and operations of community radio. For example, Hochheimer, (1993, pp 239-241), asks: “What happens when power, or people, become entrenched? When the interests, needs skills, political agendas of newcomers are at odds with those of the founders? How do these differences get worked out? How can decisions be made within a democratically-constituted hierarchy? Who decides? Who authorizes, empowers and checks on those authorized to decide? What happens whenever power is diffused?”

Research, it could be argued, is also needed to answer questions on how communities learn from radio; how they put what they learn into use; or whether particular communities need a radio station or other form of participatory media

instead; how community radio is meeting specific needs of other sub-sectors of the community such as women and youth; and why dominant political groupings or tribes sometimes resist community radio.

Community radio as alternative media

Media scholars and practitioners, among them Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi (1994), point out that one of the attractions of community radio as a form of alternative and participatory media is that it stands out as a symbol of a democratic society. It provides programming that is generated by the community, for the community and it promotes local culture and issues of local concerns.

This is in contrast to mainstream broadcasters who provide programming that caters to a wider and diversified public and with commercial and entertainment interests. Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi (1994), argue, on p. 221: "These alternative, participatory media forms not only satisfy demands for different contents, catering to tastes, interests, and orientations not catered to by mass-media output and sometimes challenging that output, but are also vehicles for direct participation in the mediated communication process and for the extension of the voices of groups and ideas otherwise not heard. The very existence of this non-mass media environment is a measure of the vibrancy of a democratic society."

Lewis, (2006, pp 5-8), defines alternative media as those media which, because of some deficiency in mainstream media (e.g. national broadcasting organisations, national newspapers, Hollywood - in all its meanings - and commercial television networks) supplement or challenge the mainstream with alternative structures, styles, content or use.

He cites examples where alternative media can be found where mass media exist or are emergent. He recalls how pockets of resistance developed in the

nineteenth century against the state and the market when the first mass medium, the printed press, developed and extended its reach in Europe and North America. Another example was Britain in the 1830s where an illegal press expressing strong opposition to government policy, for a time exceeded the mainstream press in circulation. In pre-independence Africa, anti-colonial liberation movements used newspapers to win popular support, while in the post-war period of decolonisation; radio became important in liberation struggles.

Other scholars, among them McQuail, (2005, pp 183-86), refer to alternative media as small-scale, grassroots communication channels that are independent from dominant mass media. He proposes models of normative theory to explain some shared values of alternative media, with their emphasis on smallness of scale and grassroots organization, participation and community, shared goals between producers and audiences, “plus opposition (in some cases) to the powers of state and industry.”

The chapter that follows highlights an example of the kind of problems raised by McQuail, 2005, facing small-scale, alternative media: the problems related to the power of the state as in the case of Malawi. They are caused by state dominance that is effectively preventing the broadcasting regulator from operating as an independent institution and probably discouraging other players from introducing new community radio initiatives.

CHAPTER TWO: Statement of the Problem

Community radio stations in Malawi are operating in an environment of frustration, depression and uncertainty as regards their future. This study identifies several problem areas. Chief among them are the following:

1. lack of conceptualisation by government officials and project planners of the role of community radio as agents of democratisation and national development
2. weak community ownership and involvement
3. acute shortage of skilled staff, forcing the stations to rely on part-time volunteers who are invariably seeking greener pastures elsewhere because of poor remuneration and frustration over lack of training and understanding of their roles
4. poor state of technical equipment that is prone to frequent break-downs and losses in audiences to competitor broadcasters
5. restrictive regulatory policies that are inhibiting community broadcasters in the promotion of democracy
6. a struggle by community radio stations to remain sustainable in the face of limited financial and technical resources

Any individual or organisation that wishes to broadcast to a Malawian audience must first obtain a license from the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority, MACRA, which was established in 1998 when the Malawi Communications Act became law. The Act requires MACRA to regulate broadcasting in a manner which it considers is best suited -

1. to meet demand for broadcasting services;
2. to ensure the provision of regular news services and programmes on matters of public interest in Malawi;

3. to provide for the broadcast of programmes in support of the democratic process through civic education;
4. to promote the provision of a diverse range of broadcasting services on a national and local level;
5. to promote the integrity and viability of public broadcasting services; and
6. to ensure equitable treatment of political parties and election candidates by all broadcasting licensees during any election period.

MACRA provides for three regimes of radio broadcasting: public, private and community. Chirwa, (2006), points out that the definition centres on transmission coverage and content of broadcasted materials. Thus, a community radio is supposed to cover a radius of not more than 100 kilometres, with a transmission capacity of not more than 300 watts, and limited to a particular geographical area. In practice, however, some community radio stations exceed these limitations.

The Act, under section 51 (3) limits the broadcast material of community radio stations to culture, entertainment, and educational programmes. No factual news is allowed, no political coverage, and no commercials and no paid-for programmes are permitted. Most ominously, as Chirwa, (2006), argues on p 31, no programmes in support of the democratic process are allowed. These regulatory provisions are found in Section 51 of the Act. However, in practice, sponsored programmes are tolerated. Such restrictions, argues Chirwa, (2006), are contrary to democratic principles. "They also limit the capacity of community radios to create viable resource bases for their sustainability."

It should be pointed out here that broadcasters generally face a number of statutory provisions, a hang-over from the excesses of the eras of colonialism and single-party dictatorship. Kanyongolo, (2005), says the most notable of these include the Preservation of Public Security Act, which makes it a criminal offence to publish anything that the Minister may consider to be prejudicial to public

security; the Penal Code, which criminalises the publication of anything that may cause public alarm; and the Censorship and Control of Entertainments Act which prohibits the publication of material that is considered by the Censorship Board to be undesirable. He warns that these provisions give the state powers which it can easily use to curtail pluralism and diversity in broadcasting in the name of the preservation of security, protection of public order, and safeguarding of morality and other grounds. Kanyongolo, (2005, pp 9-10) further points out: "It is arguable that some of the statutory restrictions on broadcasters are legitimate limitations of freedom that are necessary in any liberal democracy. On the other hand, it is equally true that some of the restrictions are too broad and detract from the principles of pluralism and diversity of the broadcasting landscape."

Besides such draconian laws, Malawi's broadcasting sector is also threatened by adverse influences of state domination. Kanyongolo, (2005), argues that the experience of Malawi does not promote media pluralism. MACRA, he notes, has a well-documented history of permitting domination of the state-funded broadcasters MBC and TVM by the government at the exclusion of 'opposition' voices.

Kanyongolo, (2005), attributes MACRA's failure to effectively enforce the pluralistic principles of the Communications Act particularly where these have been violated by the state-controlled broadcasters. For example, the board of directors of the authority is appointed by the President of the Republic, while the director general is appointed by the minister of information. He notes that while MACRA also has the exclusive power to grant, suspend and withdraw broadcasting licenses, it has not enforced the Communications Act effectively. "This has not necessarily been because of the lack of a legal mandate. Section 5 (1) of the Communications Act grants MACRA wide powers to regulate broadcasting. More particularly, section 5 (l) gives the authority the mandate to plan the use of and allocate radio frequencies, while section 52) (k) obliges it to perform a wide range of related functions including licensing of broadcasters;

providing advice to the minister on broadcasting regulations or policies and monitoring activities of broadcasting licensees to ensure their compliance with the terms and conditions of their licenses and applicable regulations. There is, therefore, adequate legal authority for MACRA to establish and operate an effective regulatory regime” (Kanyongolo, 2005, pp15-16).

The problems outlined so far explain to some extent the challenges faced by broadcasters in general in Malawi and in particular, community radio which is the focus of this study; especially in regard to the question of whether community radio is promoting social change in Malawi.

So what exactly is community radio? The following chapter provides definitions.

CHAPTER THREE: Definition of Community Radio

There are notorious difficulties with the term ‘community radio’ as Servaes and Thomas, (2006), point out. This, they argue, is because of the wide range of uses that community radio encompasses. For example, in Africa it is referred to as local rural radio, and as community radio; in Latin America as popular radio,

miners' radio or peasants' radio. In Europe it is often called associative radio, free radio, neighborhood radio or community radio. In Asia people speak of radio for development, and of community radio; in Oceania of aboriginal radio, public radio and of community radio. It also goes by different other names by different organizations that use it for self expression.

Its movement developed in Latin America from early uses of popular radio for development and is today generally regarded as an alternative to public and commercial radio.

As a result of the high levels of conceptual confusion by different organizations associated with the term, the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters which is commonly known by its French abbreviation, AMARC stepped in to define community radio as:

- Radio that responds to the needs of the community which it serves, and contributes to its development in a progressive manner and social change;
- Radio that offers a service to the community it serves or to which it broadcasts, while promoting the expression and participation of the community in the radio.

Community radio is a type of radio broadcasting that responds to community concerns because it belongs to and is part of the community (Servaes and Thomas, 2006, p 26).

Such definition is important for countries like Malawi where many people, it seems, do not have a proper concept of community radio. As Servaes and Thomas, (2006), explain on p 26: "As part of its efforts to realize these definitions in practice, AMARC tries to facilitate *access* to and *participation* in their organization for all community radio broadcasters, so that they can exchange information and experiences with each other. AMARC sees this type of participatory communication as not only involving the sending of messages to the

public, but as an agent for social change, cultural development and democratization. This implies a democratic structure for every community radio broadcaster and popular participation in the management of the station and in the production of programmes.”

In this regard, Servaes and Thomas (2006), on p 26, highlight an additional point of importance which is that community radio is accessible and serves to express the interests of the publics that it serves, rather than as an instrument of political power or capital. “It provides a voice distinct from either the interests of the state or private commercial radio. Community radio is an act of participation in communication. The outcome is democratically controlled radio that has a non commercial relationship with its audience; it informs, motivates discussion and entertains while broadcasting music and poetry that regenerate the collective soul.”

Tabing, (2002), defines community radio as one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community. He explains on p 11: “The community can be territorial or geographical – a township, village, district or island. It can also be a group of people with common interests, who are not necessarily living in one defined territory. Consequently, community radio can be managed or controlled by one group, by combined groups, or of people such as women, children, farmers, fisher folk, ethnic groups, or senior citizens. Tabing, (2002), says what distinguishes community radio from other media is the high level of people’s participation, both in management and programme production aspects. What he also points out is that individual community members and local institutions are the principal sources of support for community radio.

Some characteristics of community radio, summarized from documents of AMARC and UNESCO are that community radio:

- serves a recognizable community

- encourages participatory diversity
- offers opportunity to any member of the community to initiate communication and participate in programme making, management and ownership of the station
- uses technology appropriate to the economic compatibility of the people, not that which leads to dependence on external sources
- motivates community well being, not commercial considerations
- promotes and improves problem solving
- facilitates full interaction between producers and receivers of messages
- are editorially independent of government, commercial and religious institutions and political parties in determining their programme policy

Community radio is an emerging force on the African continent, particularly in South Africa. Operating alongside a range of other broadcasting services, the Independent Communications Authority, ICASA, ensures that community broadcasting services are those that are “geographically founded,” or founded on “an ascertainable common interest” that range from rural women’s initiatives to Boer Afrikaans stations (Panos, 2006, p 74).

These definitions provide clearest possible explanations of community radio and its role in the process of democratisation and national development. An important question that remains, however, is how sure anyone of the effectiveness of this role is. This question is the focus of the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER FOUR: Communication for Development

While it is true that broadcasting and print media in developing economies like Malawi can promote important campaigns like family planning, education, health and nutrition, agriculture and so forth, it is very difficult to determine whether the messages are understood as intended and whether the messages constitute 'development' for those targeted.

This means that the nature and effectiveness of development communication must be evaluated. Hard evidence has to be provided to questions like: what is the level of community participation or representation on a particular project; are the programmes that are broadcast achieving intended results? Or, what is the evidence of behaviour or social change that is being brought about by this programme? What are the success stories that could be attributed to this project? It is clear that many key questions still remain, and many assumptions need to be challenged and tested, not just on research, but even on issues like the impact of community radio, training, community participation and so forth.

As Servaes and Thomas, (2006), argue on p 8: "At the very least, these issues should raise questions about the possibilities of communication for development and caution us against an overly-optimistic view of the role that the media can play in addressing the real problems of under-development. It is often all-too easy to find a quick 'technical fix' that underestimates the nature and difficulty of complex social, historical, political and economic problems."

Servaes and Thomas, (2006, p 5), also point out the importance of understanding that the term 'development communication' is inter-changeable with 'communication for development' and 'communication for social change'. They contextualize the term against three theoretical perspectives of modernization, dependency and multiplicity/another development paradigm.

Historically, the dominant paradigm of development communication emerged in the 60s and 70s. Development was identified as something that governments deliver for or to the people. Under the modernization theory, communication was seen as a crucial factor in bringing about the psychological and sociological foundations necessary for economic development.

Exponents of this theory argued that under-developed countries needed to imitate the historical path towards development established by their colonial rulers and rich countries in order to escape under-development. The idea was for the developing countries to accomplish the task of development in less time than it took the developed countries by a combination of several methods that included the adaptation of modern methods and practices. Policy makers thought modernization would happen if the developing countries could shift the focus of labour supply from agriculture to manufacturing.

Communication scholars however, among them Robert White, (1998), came up with research that discredited this modernisation paradigm of communication as something one does to another. There was a shift away and towards a view of the media as sources of influence, working amid other influences, in a total situation – something that Gitlin, (1995, p 25), describes as “the revolt against an earlier paradigm which emphasized the power of elites (the hypodermic model on the one hand, vulgar Marxism or elite theory on the other).”

The origins of the dependency paradigm, as argued by Servaes and Thomas, (2006, pp 14-17), emerged in the 1960s from the convergence of several intellectual traditions that were rooted in extensive Latin American debate on development that ultimately formed the United Nations’ Economic Commission for Latin America, ECLA.

Servaes and Thomas, (2006), point out on p 18 that dependency theory offered a valuable analysis and critique of the international relations of power and

domination, but that the exercise of these forces constrained the ability of developing countries to formulate distinctive economic, political and communication systems.

The concept of 'another development' was first articulated in the industrialized nations of northern Europe, particularly by the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation in Sweden and the Green political movement in Germany. However, as a means of addressing promises of improving the economic conditions of people in their societies, 'another development' goes beyond narrow economic definitions of development to include the idea of participatory development and other important factors that have been developed from the research of several authors.

Servaes and Thomas, (2006) argue on pp 20-21 that this includes basic needs or efforts geared to meet people's needs; endogeneity or development derived from the heart of each society or community; self reliance based primarily on a society's own strength and resources; a rational use of natural resources, and participatory democracy. What is emerging here, they argue, is a view of participatory communication - a notion that stresses the importance of the cultural identity of local communities, and of 'democratization and participation at all levels' – international, national, local and individual.

Servaes and Thomas, (2006, p 21), further argue: "As research demonstrates, this means that development must go beyond mass communication techniques to include communication strategies that extend relationships formed through personal interaction and that allow people to discuss and resolve problems."

The above arguments in brief, summarise the relationship of the literature and theory surrounding the issues of participatory communication. This is a process that lies at the heart of the aims of this study: to explore the effectiveness of community radio as a medium for bringing about social change in Malawi. It is

against this background that the following chapter provides case studies of three community radio stations in Malawi.

CHAPTER FIVE: Community Radio Projects in Malawi

Up to five broadcasters are operating as community radio stations in Malawi. At the time of writing this study, these are: Dzimwe Community Radio, Mudziwathu Community Radio, Mzimba Community Radio, Nkhotakota Community Radio and Radio ABC.

A small band of non governmental organisations, NGOs, alongside community based organisations, CBOs, as well as media activists in Malawi are campaigning for grassroots communities to have the right to establish low-cost radio projects. The table below lists broadcasters that are licensed and operating at the time of writing this study.

**TABLE 1:
LICENSED BROADCASTERS**

NO	LICENSEE	CATEGORY	LANGUAGES	SIGNAL REACH
1	Malawi Broadcasting Corporation Radio 1	Public Broadcaster	English, Chichewa, Lomwe, Yao, Tumbuka, Tonga, Nkhonde, Sena	Nationwide
2	Malawi Broadcasting Corporation Radio 2	Public Broadcaster	English, Chichewa, Lomwe, Yao, Tumbuka, Tonga, Nkhonde, Sena	Nationwide
3	Malawi Television Ltd	Public Broadcaster	English, Chichewa	Nationwide
4	Malawi Institute of Journalism	Private (Commercial) Broadcaster	English, Chichewa	Nationwide
5	Zodiak Broadcasting Station	Private (Commercial) Broadcaster	Chichewa	Nationwide
6	Joy Radio Station	Private (Commercial) Broadcaster	English, Chichewa	Southern Region, Lilongwe, Mzuzu
7	Capital Radio	Private (Commercial) Broadcaster	English, Chichewa	Nationwide
8	FM 101 Power	Private (Commercial) Broadcaster	English, Chichewa	Nationwide
9	Star FM	Private (Commercial) Broadcaster	English, Chichewa	Nationwide
10	Radio Alinafe	Private (Religious) Broadcaster	English, Chichewa	All Central Region districts
11	Radio Maria	Private (Religious) Broadcaster	English, Chichewa	Nationwide

12	Transworld Radio	Private (Religious) Broadcaster	English, Chichewa	Nationwide
13	Radio Tigabane	Private (Religious) Broadcaster	English, Tumbuka	Mzuzu
14	Calvary Family Radio	Private (Religious) Broadcaster	English, Chichewa	Blantyre and surrounding areas (100 kms)
15	Radio Islam	Private (Religious) Broadcaster	English, Chichewa, Yao	Nationwide
16	Seventh Day Adventist	Private (Religious) Broadcaster	English, Chichewa	Blantyre
17	Channel for All Nations	Private (Religious) Broadcaster	English, Chichewa	Lilongwe
18	Television Luntha	Private (Religious) Broadcaster	English, Chichewa	Balaka, Zomba, Mulanje
19	Nkhotakota Community Radio	Community Broadcaster	English, Chichewa	Nkhotakota
20	Mzimba Community Radio	Community Broadcaster	Tumbuka	Mzimba
21	Dzimwe Community Radio	Community Broadcaster	Chichewa, Yao	Mangochi
22	Mudziwathu Community Radio	Community Broadcaster	Chichewa	Mchinji
23	Radio ABC	Community Broadcaster	English	Lilongwe (100 kms)

Source: Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority, MACRA, 2008

This chapter profiles these NGOs, their objectives on rural development and the district where their community radio projects are located. It also explains the aims of the community radio projects, their operational structures and programming objectives. The chapter highlights the levels of grassroots involvement in the community radio projects and the challenges they are facing. The community radio initiatives that are profiled in this chapter are Dzimwe Community Radio Station in Mangochi district, Mudziwathu Community Radio in Mchinji district, and Radio ABC in Lilongwe district.

Table 2: Community Radio Initiatives in Malawi

<i>Name of Station</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Initiating NGO</i>
Dzimwe Community Radio Station	Mangochi	Malawi Media Women's Association, MAMWA
Mzimba Community Radio	Mzimba	Mzimba Volunteers Association
Mudziwathu Community Radio	Mchinji	Creative Centre for Community Mobilisation, CRECOM
Nkhotakota Community Radio	Nkhotakota	Nkhotakota Community
ABC Radio	Lilongwe	African Bible College, ABC

Source: MACRA

Case Study 1:

Dzimwe Community Radio station

Malawi Media Women's Association, MAMWA, is a non governmental organisation working for the empowerment of women through media-related activities. In 1998 it set up Dzimwe Community Radio Station at Monkey Bay on the shores of Lake Malawi in Mangochi district in the Southern Region of Malawi under a license that was issued that year by MACRA.

Mangochi is one of the largest populated districts in Malawi. The traditional source of income for thousands of villagers whose huts are dotted along the shores of Lake Malawi is fishing, rain-fed agriculture and cow, goat and sheep herding. For the people here, life is a never ending struggle against food insecurity, poverty, and diseases such as malaria, cholera, tuberculosis and other HIV/AIDS related illnesses. Traditionally, women are excluded from fishing. Various reports and official documents also show that the causes of women's subjugation in Mangochi is a combination of low levels of literacy, early

marriages, frequent child bearing, and lack of access to information and resources.

The aims of Dzimwe Community Radio project are thus to empower the rural community, particularly women in Mangochi district by reflecting their concerns and needs through programmes that make use of local music and folklore. UNESCO provided a grant of US\$60,000 and the Malawi government donated two rooms at the Lake Malawi National Park offices to house the station. It was the first community radio project to be established in Malawi.

The station was almost shut down, however, in a wrangle over ownership. A contract between MAMWA and UNESCO had stipulated that the station would be handed over to the local community two years after its establishment. When the hand-over period lapsed, community representatives sought legal action and the High Court of Malawi ruled that it be handed over to the local community.

Since then, the community has elected a board of trustees that includes traditional leaders. It has also elected a board of directors from the community to monitor the station's operations.

Hilda Jambo, manager of Dzimwe Community Radio Station, says the re-focused aims of the station are to:

- address various issues of community concerns such as gender-based violence, safe mother-hood, child protection and diseases
- improve income-generation activities of women as well as fishermen
- raise literacy levels
- conserve the environment
- promote local art forms and culture in local languages
- empower rural communities to speak about issues affecting their lives

Three focus group discussions were held: one at the station, a second at Nsumbi village about three kilometers away and a third at Makawa village about 35 kms from the station to sample the station’s programming. A total of 24 persons participated in the three focus group discussions. Some participants were selected with help of the station’s management but others were selected differently to ensure independency of input. The groups were representative of a radio listening club of women, volunteer staff of the station, and fishermen. In-depth and open-ended interviews and discussions were also held with eight members of staff of the station including the station manager. All staff are part-time volunteers. Interviews and discussions were recorded in *Chichewa* and transcribed. The station also broadcasts in *Yao*, the dominant language in Mangochi.

Table 3: Focus Groups for Dzimwe Community Radio Station Case Study

Number	Distance from Station	Description of Group
1.	(Zero)	Mixed radio committee (volunteer staff)
2.	(5 kms)	Women’s Radio Listening Club
3.	(40 kms)	Fishermen

The station’s programmes are generally predictable. Many respondents say they prefer to listen to *Tisodze* (Let’s Go fishing), *Nthawi ya Achinyamata* (Teen Time), and *Chitukuko kwa Nankumba* (Adult Literacy at Nankumba) one of the larger geographical areas of Mangochi. They fail to understand, however, why the station does not carry programmes on politics. A fisherman at Makawa Village, Yusufu Liganga, 24, said this is annoying. “Timaisiya wailesi yathuyi kuti timvere za ndale pa mawailesi ena.” (‘We are forced to switch to other radio stations in order to keep abreast of political developments.’) Several commercial

stations, religious stations, as well as the two state-controlled broadcasters beam strong signals into Mangochi district.

The station's music is dominated by foreign but popular genres such as rumba of the Congo and other African regions as well as western pop and hip-hop.

Dzimwe Community Radio's staff says they are forbidden from broadcasting issues of politics by MACRA's licensing conditions. Their definition of politics is however narrowed and partisan. It does not include concepts of human rights or issues of transparency by government officials and traditional leaders.

Dzimwe Community Radio faces several other challenges. For example, it has only three small rooms to operate in. One of these serves as an on-air studio. The other room is utilised for storage of transmission equipment and a generator set. The third room is combined as a production studio and a reception area for visitors – an impractical arrangement that causes much inconvenience and frustration.

The station is poorly equipped with no spare parts. An ageing studio-to-transmitter (STL) is being used for broadcast after its main transmitter went off air several months ago. The station has no means of obtaining a new transmitter and should the STL pack up, as it most likely will, Dzimwe Community Radio Station will be permanently off air.

A mood of depression and frustration sweeps over the staff of the station. This is caused by its depressing working environment, poor remuneration, limited skills training, a poor state of equipment and uncertainty over the sustainability of the station.

Dzimwe Community Radio Station is currently operating with some assistance from African Farm Radio Research Initiative, (AFRRI), a Canadian-based NGO

as well as UNICEF, under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the two institutions.

Case Study 2:

Mudziwathu Community Radio

Creative Centre for Community Mobilisation, CRECCOM, is a Non Governmental Organisation, NGO, working in Malawi since 1999 for grassroots involvement and participation in development projects. In June 2006, it set up Mudziwathu Community Radio station at Mchinji township, 110 kms north-west of Lilongwe the capital of Malawi, under a license that was granted by MACRA.

Mchinji is the biggest district in the Central Region of Malawi with a population of about 400,000. Traditional sources of income in hundreds of villages strewn across the region is from rain-fed agriculture, cattle and pig rearing and small-scale vending and bartering since Mchinji is also a small town close to the neighbouring state of Zambia.

Life in the district, like in Mangochi, is a struggle against hunger, poverty and AIDS-related illnesses. Women are also subjugated because of low levels of literacy, frequent child bearing, lack of access to information and resources, as well as cultural practices that are promoted by *Nyau*, a secretive male-dominated cult that terrorises the un-initiated, including women.

Station Manager, George Jobe, says Mudziwathu Community Radio's aim is to give its audience a powerful voice with which to tell success stories about HIV/AIDS prevention and mitigation, exchange general development problems and solutions, and to allow for constructive dialogue between decision makers and their constituencies.

Two other topics of concern for the station are child labour and human trafficking. Young men and women are trafficked regularly across the border, victims of bright lights and thumping music that offers false promises of a life better than

their in their sleepy, dirt-poor villages. The station's programmes are in Chichewa and Senga, a language that is spoken in Mchinji and Zambia. English is also used because the audience includes people who do not speak the other two languages.

Table 4: Focus Groups for Mudziwathu Community Radio Case Study

Number	Distance from Station	Description of Group
1.	(15 kms)	Women's Radio Listening Club
2.	(5 kms)	Students Mixed Group
3.	(2 kms)	Market Vendors

Alongside these topics, Mudziwathu Community Radio is airing programmes supported by several CBOs. For example, programmes on child labour and human trafficking are sponsored by Target National Relief and Development, TANARD, as well as by Action Aid, National Initiative for Civic Education, NICE. Such support and operation in a building provided by CRECCOM, is assisting the station's efforts to achieve sustainability.

Mudziwathu Community Radio is nonetheless also facing serious challenges, judging from results of three focus group discussions with its audiences and in prolonged interviews with various people including the staff of the station during the course of this study. One of the groups represented a radio listening club at Kaphanda Village, about 15 kms from the station; another was a mixed group of students that was selected independently by the researcher in Mchinji town about five kms from the station, and the third was made up of market vendors who were also independently selected about two kms from the station.

A total of 22 persons participated in the three groups. In-depth and open-ended interviews and discussions were also held with three volunteer members of staff

of the station. The responses included input to a questionnaire that was e-mailed to the station manager since he was away from the station. The interviews were recorded in English and transcribed, while the discussions were recorded in Chichewa and also transcribed. The following, based on the focus group discussions and interviews, are the main challenges and successes of Mudziwathu Radio Station:

- a woman's radio listening club at Kaphande Village, mentioned above, which is representative of the station's audience, not able to recall the titles of programmes. This suggests a need for some, or all, of the following research objectives: intensive promotion of programming and titles; more on-air audience interactions; more focused and lively programmes on specific topics
- audiences are generally pleased with content of programmes such as *Bwalo La Ana* (Children's Voice), *Ticheze Amayi* (Women, Let's Talk), and *M'mudzi Mwathu* (In My Village). They said however, some of these programmes needed to be livened up
- audiences want to hear more, not less, programmes dealing with human rights issues. One example was a story that resulted in better treatment of prisoners after the station exposed police brutality, including starvation of prisoners
- audiences want to hear more stories and voices of political players, especially of those living within their communities who are aspiring for political office
- turn-over of volunteer staff heading for greener pastures is high due to poor remuneration. The station requires more full-time, well trained and better paid staff
- The station does not have enough equipment for recording and producing music in local languages. As a result, it is over-relying on foreign music

- The station is in urgent need of new, technical equipment including a new transmitter. At the time of writing this study, it was operating with a borrowed transmitter and a faulty studio-to-transmitter-link (STL) that audiences say is resulting in a poor signal.
- power blackouts are resulting in regular programme losses, forcing audiences to switch to competitor mainstream stations, including Breeze FM, a privately-owned Zambian community radio station broadcasting out of Chipata just across the border.
- Management and volunteer staff at the station are struggling against a tide of problems. These include a lack of understanding of political economy and democratic values by volunteer staff, as well as population largely illiterate and affected by problems of urban migration

For the volunteer staff of Mudziwathu Community Radio, the added challenge is how to convince a mostly illiterate population to use it as a platform for social discussion, democratic negotiation and change in its daily struggle against hunger, ignorance, poverty and disease. As in Mangochi, women in Mchinji are subjugated as a result of low levels of literacy, early marriages, frequent child bearing, and lack of access to information and resources.

Mudziwathu Community Radio has a Project Advisory Committee that includes Mchinji's district commissioner, four members from locally-based NGOS, churches, and two persons from the traditional leadership of the district. This structure does not promote democratic ownership of the station. It is not in keeping with the definition of community radio discussed earlier, including the important question of ownership and management by the community.

Case Study 3:

ABC Radio

African Bible College, ABC, is a USA-sponsored religious institution that has been working in Malawi over the past 12 years to promote Christianity and teach

communication to students. In May 1995, it set up Radio ABC in Lilongwe city under special dispensation by the authorities with a mission statement of "Teaching the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ through the airwaves". It was granted a community radio license in 1999 a year after MACRA came into existence.

Lilongwe is a cosmopolitan with a population of about 400,000. It is the seat of government and several foreign countries maintain diplomatic missions in the city. It also the power-base of the Chewa, one of Malawi's main ethnic groupings. Lilongwe's main economic activities are based on agriculture, especially production of tobacco the main foreign-exchange earner for Malawi. Cattle rearing are also widespread while maize is produced mainly on smallholder plots.

Like in other areas of Malawi, a majority of people in Lilongwe face the twin threats of hunger and poverty. The spectre of death is ever looming from AIDS-related illnesses. The effects of the *Nyau* cult also combine with low levels of literacy, frequent child bearing and lack of access to information and resources to keep women subjugated.

Radio ABC is selected for purposes of this study as a comparative analysis of a community radio station that is not owned by a rural community, but a religious institution. Its programme content is not produced by representatives of rural communities either, but by the institution that owns it, African Bible College, ABC. The station is also not located in a rural setting but virtually in the centre of Lilongwe city.

Radio ABC is thus a ministry of African Bible College which receives financial assistance from churches and individuals in the USA. The aims of Radio ABC are to:

- provide the word of God to rural people in Lilongwe district as well as to urban-based people in the capital
- enable people to hear the word of God in their homes, cars and even hotel rooms
- use the station to help teach biblical studies up to degree level, with communication as a minor, at the ABC campus

Random interviews were conducted in Lilongwe city with a total of 15 persons that were selected by this researcher. The interviewees were representative of audiences of ABC Radio . Open-ended interviews were also held with the station manager. Interviews were conducted in English. The station broadcasts in English and Chichewa. English is the official language and Chichewa is the national language of Malawi.

Several respondents say they regard ABC Radio more of a religious station than anything else and that they enjoy its spirituals and programming because it fulfills their spiritual needs. Others are critical of its output, that it fails to address local issues of social concern and that it places too much emphasis on religion.

ABC Radio's station manager, Macleod Munthali says the station faces less challenges compared to other community broadcasters because of availability of funding and technical support from the USA. Thus, ABC Radio regularly provides technical assistance to other community radio broadcasters in response to their requests for transmitters and other equipment.

On the station's policy on gender, Munthali says: "At Radio ABC we believe that if one accepts to be a born Christian (not just a nominal Christian), there will be no gender that will be above the other." And in regard to Radio ABC's policy on human rights or political issues, he says: "If you ask people who call themselves the voiceless, they would love to comment on politics. Radio ABC has left other people to handle politics."

Chirwa, (2006, p.26), is critical of such policy. He says it is reflected by other religious broadcasters which dominate the broadcasting sector in Malawi. “The predominance of religious stations, though good in the sense that it may be a factor enhancing independence, objectivity, and transparency, is potentially dangerous in the sense that it can easily become a factor for the propagation and spread of religious intolerance and hate speech.” He argues: “Experience from conflict-torn countries such as Rwanda and Burundi has shown the power of radio as an instrument of intolerance and as a medium for hate speech.”

The case studies described above illustrate some of the peculiarities and problems affecting community radio broadcasting in Malawi. These include lack of conceptualisation of community radio by officials and planners, weak community ownership of the stations, and scarce technical and human resources, as well as a limited grasp of social issues by generally uninformed rural communities.

The chapter that follows highlights some useful strategies in community radio broadcasting that are being adopted in Malawi’s neighbouring states. They offer some practical lessons for this country.

CHAPTER SIX: Lessons from the Region

This chapter discusses strategies that Malawi's neighbouring states are putting in place for the development of an energised community radio sector that is empowering grassroots communities to play a greater role in the promotion of national development and democracy. The lessons are drawn from Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia.

In this regard, Mozambique which has over 50 community radio stations, according to (Jallov, 2004, p.1), and other published reports, offers some of the most practical strategies. To start with, Mozambique struck a partnership with UNESCO and UNDP to develop a five-tier practical and sustainable project (1998-2006). The project develops community radio that averts a top-down approach along the following strategies:

- strong community ownership is a *sine qua non* when working within a framework of a donor-initiated process. Only when the community truly sees the medium as theirs, will the basis be in place. This requires basing the radio in a community association or a community committee; ensuring that there is an extended organisation and mobilisation period for the arrival of equipment; recruitment of coaches to mobilise and train large groups of community members. These ensure that all production is done by community editorial production groups and see that radio sets are placed where they are accessible to all 'communities within the community'
- training and capacity building involving intensive, formal community radio training courses, recruitment of 'process coaches' initially locally based and active, later overall coaches at national level, as well as development of manuals, etc., including technical sustainability involving technical training

- financial partnership strategy to develop partnerships with a variety of different potential partners, including NGOs and other civil society actors, government departments with specific mandates, communal entities and international organisations. Sustainability is seen as possible when a community radio station, working on the basis of a strategic plan and direction, has the capacity to attract resources from a variety of partnerships and possess capacity to manage the resources and partnerships effectively
- development of effective local content by ‘editorial groups’ of volunteer community programmers. Each group has a specified area of specialisation like health, education or culture, and through training and work become the local knowledge base in their area
- development of an impact assessment methodology (IAM) to make sure all is on track. A key role is that of a ‘community mobiliser’. This person holds one of four paid positions in the radio station and is responsible for continued contact with the community, ensuring that all ‘communities within the community’ are represented and active, coordinating the work of the editorial groups and the volunteer community programmers. This person is also responsible for research and ongoing training of community programmers.

In terms of impact assessment of the station, three key issues need to be addressed.

1. The radio itself as an organisation has to be working effectively, involving all ‘communities in the community’ and applying participatory, open and access-based principles.
2. Programmes have to hit their target by being locally good and effective.
3. The station has to have impact that achieves much needed and desired community development and change.

In connection with this, experience in Mozambique shows that it is possible for volunteer community radio producers to carry out impact assessment methodologies and techniques as well as analysis, thereby avoiding expensive involvement of external researchers. Nonetheless a consultant might be contracted to develop a set of qualitative indicators for assessing community impact.

The Mozambican experience further shows that three main areas of impact assessment are required to ensure that a community radio station works effectively as an institution. This requires basing itself on principles of access and participation, and that all communities within the community are kept continuously involved in the work of the project. This also requires the community radio mobiliser to take a check list of how the radio is evolving in management and to human resource development, continuity and funding. This involves constant dialogue with key staff and volunteers and submitting a full and detailed report to management structures on issues such as vacancies, responsibilities and tasks, training, volunteer structures, strategic and related action plans, programme contents, variations and relevance to community needs, community involvement and participation, stakeholder involvement and partnerships, fundraising initiatives, etc.

Radio, and community radio in particular, plays a crucial role in community-based disaster management strategies in Mozambique. For example, during 2007, early warning systems and the media enabled government and local communities to identify the most at-risk flood areas in advance. Mass evacuations were carried out in the most threatened low-lying districts. Elsewhere, emergency food supplies and medical equipment were put in place before the floods arrived (UNDP, 2008).

Zambia, on the other hand, offers equally valuable advice on the key questions of funding and sustainability. A report submitted by the Zambian chapter of the

Media Institute of Southern Africa, MISA Zambia, to parliament on 15th April 2008, calls on the Government to enact legislation providing for the funding of community radio stations. It says there is urgent need to establish a community radio development support fund to provide grants for the development of community radio stations, along the lines of South Africa's statutory Media Development and Diversity Agency, MDDA, which provides funding to emerging community media institutions.

Community radio stations in Zambia are currently supported by a mixed kind of funding involving among others, donors such as UNESCO, Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, OSISA, and other NGOs. They are also funded through advertising revenue and programme sponsorships.

At the time of writing this study, Zambia had close to 30 different types of community and private radio stations. Some are owned by churches while others by communities and even private citizens.

What makes so much difference, says the report, is that community radio stations continue to provide programming that is relevant to local communities as opposed to national audiences. Managers are encouraged to see their stations not just as conveyors of information and education on various issues affecting their communities, but also as facilitators of community development.

The management structure of a community radio station in Zambia is based on a three-tier system of management comprising a general meeting or assembly where members of the community are represented. Under it there is a governing council or board on which there are elected or appointed members. The role of community radio governing councils or boards is policy formulation and provision of oversight.

MISA Zambia advises boards elected from within the communities to enhance community participation by directing the affairs of the stations: not by serving sectional interests but the interests of the entire community. Persons elected to the boards of community radio stations are expected to be independent and not to be active in party politics.

A part-time or full time management serves under the board. This consists of qualified professionals in their fields of media management, technical, marketing and advertising, accounts, journalism, etc. A station manager appointed by the board heads the management teams. The manager appoints his team, often consisting of professionals, heading departments that include programmes, news and current affairs, marketing, accounts, and technical.

As in Malawi, community radio stations in Zambia have faced challenges not only relating to funding and sustainability, but also political interference, a rigid policy and regulatory framework, and insufficient training to consolidate the role of the sector. One difference, however, is that in Zambia, a recommendation has been made to transfer regulatory authority of the broadcasting sector from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services to an Independent Broadcasting Authority, IBA.

Tanzania faces almost similar challenges. Campaigners of community radio argue, however, that despite these challenges, there are marketable opportunities for growth of the sector (Tibanyendera, 2008). For example, a Media Services Bill is to be tabled in parliament to be enacted into law. Tanzania's Communications Regulatory Authority, TCRA, which is the main regulatory body for communications, including broadcasting, has been showing signs of collaboration with media stakeholders in addressing existing challenges.

This collaboration is expected to result in a widening of the definition of community radios to reflect cognisance of diverse communities, which in Tanzania, now include public transport operators, gender-based communities,

religious communities, dock workers, community service organisations, CSOs, farmers, and many others. The TCRA was also expected to reduce even further, license fees of community broadcasters and to develop a multiplex plan that would, among other things, relieve initiators of community radio stations the burden of constructing transmission towers. Generally, media activists in Tanzania report that the country is now enjoying media pluralism and diversity. Community radio, argues, Tibanyendera, (2008), has added value in diversity of ideas, freedom of expression and knowledge sharing.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions and recommendations

This study has attempted to highlight a struggle that campaigners in Malawi are engaged in to establish community radio broadcasting. This is a new tier of broadcasting, that is not owned or controlled by the state, or commercial, or narrow special interests, but that is owned, managed and utilised by grassroots communities to exercise their rights to communicate, promote their culture, and participate in democracy and national development. In this regard, the study has attempted to analyse the challenges confronting the campaigners and volunteer workers by contextualising the arguments of the study against the research evidence of international and local scholars in the field of mass communication and social change.

The Government of Malawi recognised the rights of grassroots communities by opening up the airways to allow for the establishment of community radio projects and legalizing this process through the Communications of 1998. Since then, however, successive administrations -- and for that matter opposition political groupings -- have not demonstrated any will to amend the Act or to introduce new policies that would correct identified anomalies in the broadcasting sector, or generally empower grassroots communities through the promotion of community broadcasting.

As this study has argued, community radio can, and does provide space for debate and discussion as well as political participation. It can also provide space for the improvement of operations in local government institutions by ensuring that they are operating in an environment that is transparent, free of corruption, and that exposes human rights abuses. Such space can be created, only if there is political will to reform existing policies, and if grassroots communities are regarded as important partners for consultation and discussion and not just there

to be informed about development policies in a top-down approach. The type of reformation that is argued for here, can be gleaned from the comparative analysis provided by this study of policy frameworks for community radio operations and strategies in Malawi's neighbouring states, Mozambique, Zambia and Tanzania. Mozambique's experience in particular, demonstrates how community radio can be used effectively in national development.

In conclusion, this study therefore recommends for stakeholders to convene a series of conferences and workshop at an earliest possible opportunity that would negotiate for the introduction of a new policy on community radio broadcasting in Malawi. Key participants at such a workshop would include community radio activists, media specialists, government officials, representatives of NGOs, political groupings, regulators, policy planners, development partners, community based organisations, researchers and academics and representatives of grassroots communities.

A new policy is required for at least four reasons. The first one is that it would remove the deficiencies that have been identified in the current Malawi Communications Act 1998, as well as in the policies governing the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority, MACRA, including the question of whether it should be answerable to Parliament or the Executive. These deficiencies are being widely criticised by media practitioners, lawyers and academics. Some of these deficiencies, as illustrated by this study, include lack of clarity in the definition of a community radio station. The example provided of ABC Radio in Lilongwe is a case in point.

Secondly a rethink of policy is necessary because of the apparent lack of support of community radio by government, even in the face of success stories achieved by grassroots communities programmes of the DCP and the DBU. A rethink is overdue because of the current narrow definition of politics, which is also shackling community radios despite Malawi having embraced multi-party

democracy 14 years ago. Grassroots communities need to be given space, through community radios, to discuss issues of transparency, human rights and to broaden their understanding of what political economy is all about.

Thirdly, a policy change would help to address the problem of lack of skills set in grassroots communities as well as in recruitment and training of workers on community radio stations. Unlike in Mozambique, there is no guidance or policy in investment, training, recruitment and remuneration on community radios in Malawi. Volunteers are invariably poached or simply leave for greener pastures.

Fourthly, a policy change would help to provide an answer to the question why there are so few initiators for community radio initiatives despite funding being provided for community-based initiatives by bilateral development partners such as UNESCO and USAID.

Despite the challenges outlined, the examples of the DCP and DBU projects, as well as the initiatives in Mozambique, Zambia and South Africa offer a way forward for community radio that would assist millions of people to drag themselves out of poverty, ignorance and disease in Malawi. A new policy would also help to locate clearly, the place of community radio in national development and democratic practice in this country.

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