

The use of Community Radio to Support Local Development Efforts in Ethiopia: The Case of Waghimra Community Radio

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ABSTRACT

Currently, around 34 community radio broadcasters are operational in Ethiopia. Because community radio is a new media culture in Ethiopia, the main purpose of this study was to investigate to what extent Waghimra Community Radio has been successful in supporting local development efforts since its establishment. To serve the purpose of the study, quantitative method was employed. By using questionnaire, the necessary data were collected from all educated civil servants (426) who was working in Seqota town and available at the time of data gathering. A very brief interview was also conducted with the Head of the radio station. The analysis and interpretation of data show that a little more than 36% of respondents believed that Waghimra Community Radio served the local community to acquire fresh information while 54.7% of the respondents believed that the participation of the local people in managing the Station is inadequate. More than 51% of the respondents believed that it does not serve the public interest. The study has also concluded that local government has at least an indirect control on the Station. The study recommended that to ensure the editorial independence and the very basic ownership of the radio system, the Station Board needs to be restructured so that it can be controlled by members of ordinary people. Various organizations need to support the Station in order to resolve the constraints related to financial problems, technical breakdown and lack of manpower.

Keywords: *Development, community radio, broadcast, listenership, participation.*

INTRODUCTION

The poor have neither the chance nor the means to articulate themselves. As there are lots of people who speak about the poor, the poor hardly speak about themselves. Though they are estimated to constitute the majority from those who walk on our planet, the numbers of mass medium/radio they run are not worth mentioning. Due to this, the poor often speak neither to others nor to themselves through mass medium.

The irony is that, the 'rich' people, such as the political and economic elites, speak countless times about the poor through various means of communications, including mass media, often using various nicknames such as 'vulnerable', 'the poorest', 'marginalized', 'less fortunate', 'disempowered', 'information poor', etc. (Jemal, 2011). As a matter of fact, "The poor have always been... described and interpreted by the rich and the educated, never by themselves" (FAO, 2012).

Development communication specialists have acknowledged that poor people including various communities and minorities are deprived of access to information and means of self-expression simply because the mass media are overwhelmingly owned and run by the 'rich' (Ondobo, 2001). Owing to this, they have aggressively expressed their trust on community radio, which some prefer to call it as '*small*' medium (AMARC, 2007). The community radio station is "one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community" (Tabing, 2002, p. 11). Based on this magnificent vision, therefore, the '*small*' medium is considered as the '*BIG*' medium for the

poor who are virtually excluded from the mainstream media landscape especially in developing countries. If they are effectively used, community radios can be one of the main players in health care, poverty alleviation, and crime prevention activities (The World Bank, 2007, p. 92).

Currently, more than 40 community radio broadcasters are licensed in Ethiopia. For the preponderance of Amhara people or Ethiopians in general, community radios can be considered as the best alternative mass media. As long as appropriately used, it is unquestionable that the stations can be the voice for the majority of people around their localities who are often left as voiceless of the mainstream state media.

From the community radios that are established in Ethiopia, four of them are found in the Amhara National Regional State (ANRS). Two of the stations (Waghimra Community Radio and Kombolcha Community Radio) are operational and they are totally owned and run by the local community. The other two community radios are owned by universities (Bahir Dar University and Debre Tabor University) and they are not yet operational.

Funded by the World Bank so as to support the local development endeavours, Waghimra Community Radio established in 2009 and started broadcasting in March 2010. At the beginning of this study, i.e. in 2015, it was broadcasting for 4 hours a day (2 hours each in different languages: Himtigna and Amharic) with 4 to 5 active volunteers that work as reporters (personal interview with the Head of the Station, 2015). Compared to the Kombolcha Community Radio, Waghimra Community Radio is established in one of the remote areas of Amhara Regional State. Compared to the other ten zones of ANRS, Waghimra zone has a poor infrastructure due to it being the most backward areas of Amhara region and one of the areas of the country that has been frequently affected by drought (BoFED, 2013).

Compared to the majority of community radios that are operating in the country, it is evident that the responsibility of Waghimra Community Radio is big as it is working in a place which has been mostly affected by recurrent droughts. But, it is not known whether it serves its community according to the basic tenets and principles of community radio, though "The historical philosophy of community radio is to use this medium as the voice of the voiceless, the mouthpiece of oppressed people (be it on racial, gender, or class grounds) and generally as a tool for development" (Pavarala & Malik, 2007, p. 16). Thus, it is a timely task to explore to what extent it is successful to be the voice of the people so that to support sustainable local development efforts.

Some of the challenges faced by community radios can also be the cause for the death (closure) of some of the stations. This is what happened to Harar Community Radio (HCR). The station has interrupted its broadcast and then shut down because of lack of proper management, financial problems and technical breakdown since June 2005 (Mathewos, 2006). Waghimra Community Radio has faced interruption of program transmission more than three times since its establishment, i.e. 2009 (personal interview with the Head of the Station, 2015).

Apart from living with challenges, community radio is a new media culture in Ethiopia. Owing to this, it is dubious that communities are in a position to use the radio stations in an effective and efficient way to employ them as a means for local development. It is, therefore, a timely task to investigate to what extent Waghimra Community Radio is supporting the local development efforts successful while struggling with the inevitable challenges.

As the study is going to explore to what extent Waghimra Community Radio is successful in supporting local development efforts, the researcher believes that the following questions would help it to attain the objective the research:

1. What is the level of community participation in the production of radio programs?
2. What is the role that has been played by the station in creating a platform for the community to discuss their social and economic problems?
3. To what extent the Station is operating in line with community radio tenets, i.e. by whom the station's agendas are set, the role of ordinary people in managing the Station, whether the station manages to be voice for the voiceless, etc.?
4. What are the major challenges the station has faced?

PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY RADIO (CR)

Tabing (2002, p. 11) succinctly defines community radio as a station "that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community". It is owned and managed by a particular community to provide a non-profit service while promoting the active participation of the community in radio message production (Fraser & Estrada, 2001; AMARC cited in Servaes, 2008).

According to Tabing (ibid. 11-12), a community radio has to follow a set of principles which includes *access*. Community members' access not only to radio products but also to the radio facilities has to be secured as it is "the primary step towards the full democratization of the communication system" (ibid.). This can be done by opening the feedback channel and maintaining full interaction between the producers and receivers of messages.

The second principle is *participation*, which is the outcome of the first principle, i.e. access. Participation in the production and management of the radio is possible through access. "Citizen's participation in radio is allowed at all levels – from planning to implementation and evaluation of the project" (ibid.). Citizens or community members participate in the decision-making process, which includes making decisions about the program contents, duration and schedule.

Participation is followed by *self-management* of the communication facility, which is the third principle. "Once the community members gain necessary experience and assimilate the required skills there is no reason for preventing them from managing and owning the radio station" (ibid.).

Community mandate is the fourth principle. The process of democratizing the communication system will inevitably result in community mandate, which encompasses not only managing but also owning the radio station.

The last principle is *accountability*. As long as radio ownership gives power, accountability has to be exercised. If accountability is not in the hands of the managers and broadcasters, "there is no sense in having the opportunity to operate, control and manage the station" (ibid.).

BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY RADIO

Jemal (2015) has listed eight benefits of community radio that stem from its distinct characteristics. They are discussed here briefly:

a. Ownership of the Radio System Belongs to the Community.

Community radio is solely owned by the community as owning and controlling the means of communication is the very basic idea of community media. Contrary to the mainstream media, it is an essential medium that respects the communication rights of a community and grants the voices of the poor and marginalized to be heard.

b. CR is a Voice for the Voiceless.

Arguably, individuals are born to communicate. Community radio “is about people who have social and economic concerns, critical problems and cultural issues” but who is almost excluded from the media landscape. Because the mainstream media have failed to ensure the right of ordinary people to communicate, since their inception, community radio strives to fill this gap by serving as a voice for the voiceless. AMARC (2007, p. 46) points out: “The importance of voice and the ability to exert the right to communicate may not seem so important for those who have that right ensured, but it can be the most meaningful social change indicator in communities that have never been heard”.

Community radio grants community members to access information that are educational and developmental. It helps to place community members or villagers “in charge of their own affairs” (Tabing, 2002, p. 12) by providing them the opportunity to express themselves socially, politically and culturally. Their transmission may cover only a few miles, “but community radio stations are enabling isolated communities across Africa to voice their own concerns. On air, ordinary citizens discuss issues that are central to them” (Madamombe, 2005, p. 4). These can be various development related subjects such as farming tips, HIV/AIDS, gender relations and ideas for income generation.

c. CR Plays Paramount Role for Development.

A community radio that operates in developing countries has a wide range of responsibilities and a paramount role in the processes of development. Castello (p. 21-22) states that community radio is “a powerful tool for informing on topics those are crucial to rural livelihoods, an agent of social change, a tool for conflict management and conflict resolution”. In short, there is no mass medium that can substitute CR since the main function of the station is to assist development efforts that a given community looks for.

d. CR Suits to the Rural Settings that are Yearning Development.

Due to its distinct characteristics, community radio is the most appropriate medium for rural settings that are longing development for decades if not for a century. As long as CR is small and relatively easy to manage, it fits well with the rural settings where skilled professionals not often available.

e. CR is Highly Participatory.

In most cases, in the landscape of state or commercial media, it is the radio or television that moves into the community. The mainstream media normally follow a hunt-and-catch approach. But in the arena of CR, it is the community that moves to the radio. The simple

reason is that a CR is owned and controlled by the community itself. By assuring access to voices in the community and encouraging diversity, creativity and participation, community radio provides a means for local communities to voice their own issues, concerns, cultures, traditions and languages.

On the other hand, it provides a crucial counterbalance to the increasing globalization and commercialization of the media. While transnational conglomerates are in hurry to strengthen their control of the global media landscape, local communities are struggling to create democratic media systems. Actually, "The expansion of CR [community radio] is the result of the reduction of diversity of voices that accompany the formation of media conglomerates that accompanies the globalization processes" (AMARC, 2007, p. 7).

f. CR is Dedicated to the Production of Local Programs.

Community radio stations are highly dedicated to local programming that is often neglected by the mainstream media. Since community radio is a social process where members of a community federate to design and produce programs and air them, the outcome is frequently the broadcast of material that is unavailable elsewhere on the dial (Walker, 2008; Howley, 2008; AMARC, 2007; Vinod & Kanchan, 2007). This will definitely make the radio programs listenable, which in turn lead to more participation among members of the community that might pave the way for gradual attitudinal and behavioural change.

g. CR Allows Farmers to Become "Little Journalists".

Community radio, as it alters media ownership, also alters the way media messages are produced. The radio message production is no more the monopoly of journalists. Villagers, who are the poor and less educated (farmers, pastoralists or laborers), report from the field and produce in and broadcast programs from studio. That means audiences can be engaged not only as listeners and interviewees but also as an interviewer (reporter), program producer and even newscaster. The "stumbling block" between professional radio elite and the ordinary people is broken away as long as community radios permit the poor to become "little journalists" (Carpentier, Lie & Servaes, 2008, p. 367).

h. The Door is Open for Two-Way Communication.

Ordinary citizen or farmers produce a radio message about the development concerns of listeners who themselves are ordinary citizens or farmers. In the landscape of community radio, listeners are not only passive "receivers" of information but they are also producers and purveyors of messages. As they listen to the radio station, they also speak through it. Community radio is the dearest mass medium for local communities as the proverb says "the nearest is the dearest". Due to this, the possibility is very high to employ community radio in a two-way communication as long as it is used effectively. Brecht argues; "Radio should be converted from a distribution system to a communication system ... This means that radio would have to give up being a purveyor and organize the listener as a purveyor (quoted in Vatikiotis, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

Since the main purpose of this research is to investigate to what extent Waghimra Community Radio is successful in supporting local development efforts, the researcher

followed a quantitative approach. The research required respondents that have the competence to evaluate and make sound judgments about the use of the community radio. Hence, the qualities of the respondents of this research were defined as educated civil servants who are working in Waghimra town and have at least a college diploma. Owing to this, questionnaires were the instrument utilised for gathering data.

The drop-and-collect technique was employed to boost the response rate, since the country's postal system is very poor and unreliable and respondents are less interested and showed reluctance to mailed questionnaires (Raj, 2007).

Based on the identified qualities of respondents, which have been described earlier, the data were collected from all civil servants who were available at the time of data collection. Hence, the researcher distributed 431 questionnaires and managed to collect 428 while only three questionnaires were left unreturned. From the collected questionnaires, two were incomplete and vague. Thus, 426 questionnaires were filtered and used in the data analysis. In order to obtain some background information about the Waghimra Community Radio, a very brief interview was also conducted with the Head of the radio station.

As discussed, though more than 30 community radios are operating at national level, the scope of this study is limited to Waghimra Community Radio because it allows for a thorough analysis and helps to understand to what extent a community radio can serve local people who are living in a remote area as means of communication for their development.

FINDINGS

Profile of The Respondents

As stated earlier, the target population of this research was all educated civil servants working in Seqota town where Waghimra Community Radio is found. The data were collected from all civil servants (426) who were available at the time of data collection.

a. Gender and Age

From the total respondents, nearly 61% are male while 39% are female. One respondent declined to disclose his/her gender. On the other hand, the majority (52.8%) of respondents is within the age group of 25-35 years, while the next large group (20.4%) is within the age group of 36-45.

b. Level of Education

With regards to the level of education, similar numbers of respondents have a diploma (49.3%) and first degree (46.5%). Only 9 (2.1%) respondents have their second degree, indicating the lack of highly qualified personnel or experts not only in the town but also in the zonal administration.

c. Monthly Salary

The majority of respondents (33.6%) earn a monthly salary from Birr 2001 to 3000 while 29.1% of respondents earn a monthly salary of 3001 to 4000 Birr. Those who earned more than 4000 Birr constituted less than 15%. Civil servants who received a monthly salary of 3000 Birr and below are much larger (55.2%) than civil servants who earn a monthly salary of more than 3000 Birr (43.7%).

d. *Possession of Media Equipments*

Some 98.4% of the respondents confirmed that they have mobile phones. The next largest media equipment ownership (72.1%) is the possession of the television set. It is also worth mentioning that ownership of a radio receiver is low with only 21.6% of respondents owning a radio receiver at home.

From the data (Figure 1), it is clear to understand that the penetration of the new communication technology, i.e. mobile phone, is overwhelmingly high (98.4%). This implies that educated civil servants can easily as well as quickly be accessed as a mass through mobile phone than any other mass media outlet. The state of broadcast media (radio and television) ownership shows that much of the educated people have a better attachment to the television medium as viewership rather than to the radio medium as listenership.

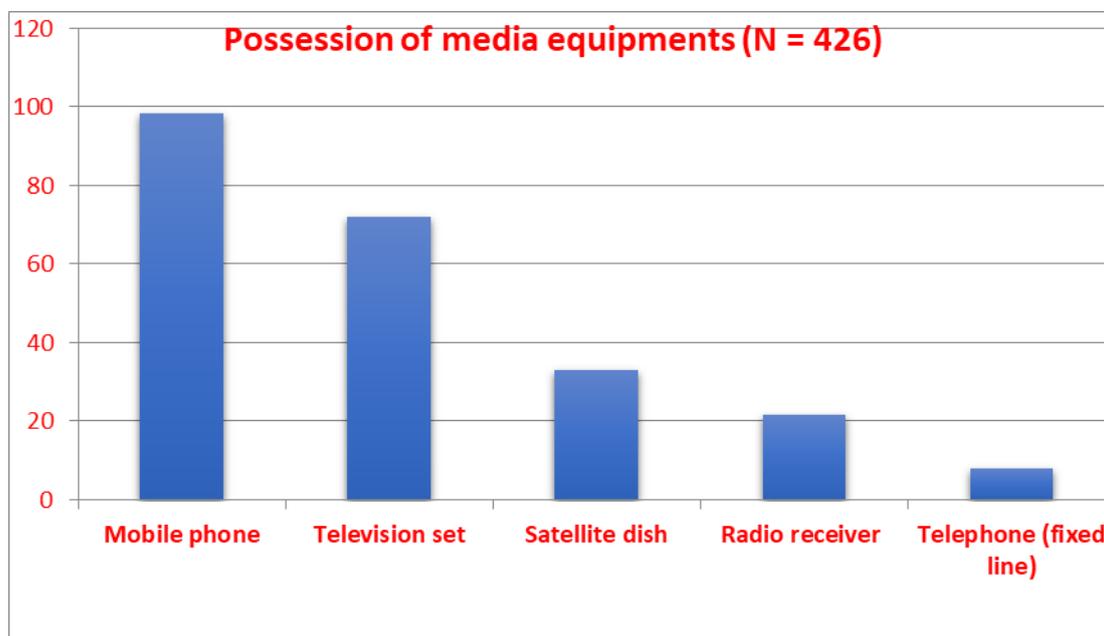


Figure 1: Shows respondents' possession of media equipments.

e. *The Use of Mobile Phone*

Respondents who have mobile phones were asked for what more purposes they are using their mobiles than getting in touch with somebody by making and receiving calls. More than 70% of the respondents use their mobile to exchange text messages. A little more than half of them use their mobiles to obtain information from the Internet (Google, Facebook, etc. [52.3%]) and to view TV stories and videos (52.1%).

An important number of respondents also use their mobile phones to listen to radio programs (47.6%) and to play games (41.5%). A little more than 29% of respondents use their mobile to listen radio regularly (*usually* and *sometimes*) while more than 16% of them listen to radio programs via their mobile phones *rarely*. Game playing is significantly low; the number of those who use their mobile phones *usually* and *sometimes* for this purpose is minimal (4.2%, 11.3%, respectively). A little more than 26% of them use it to play games *rarely*.

Sending short text message to educated civil servants might be the most effective communication strategy as they are highly active and involved in the use of this service.

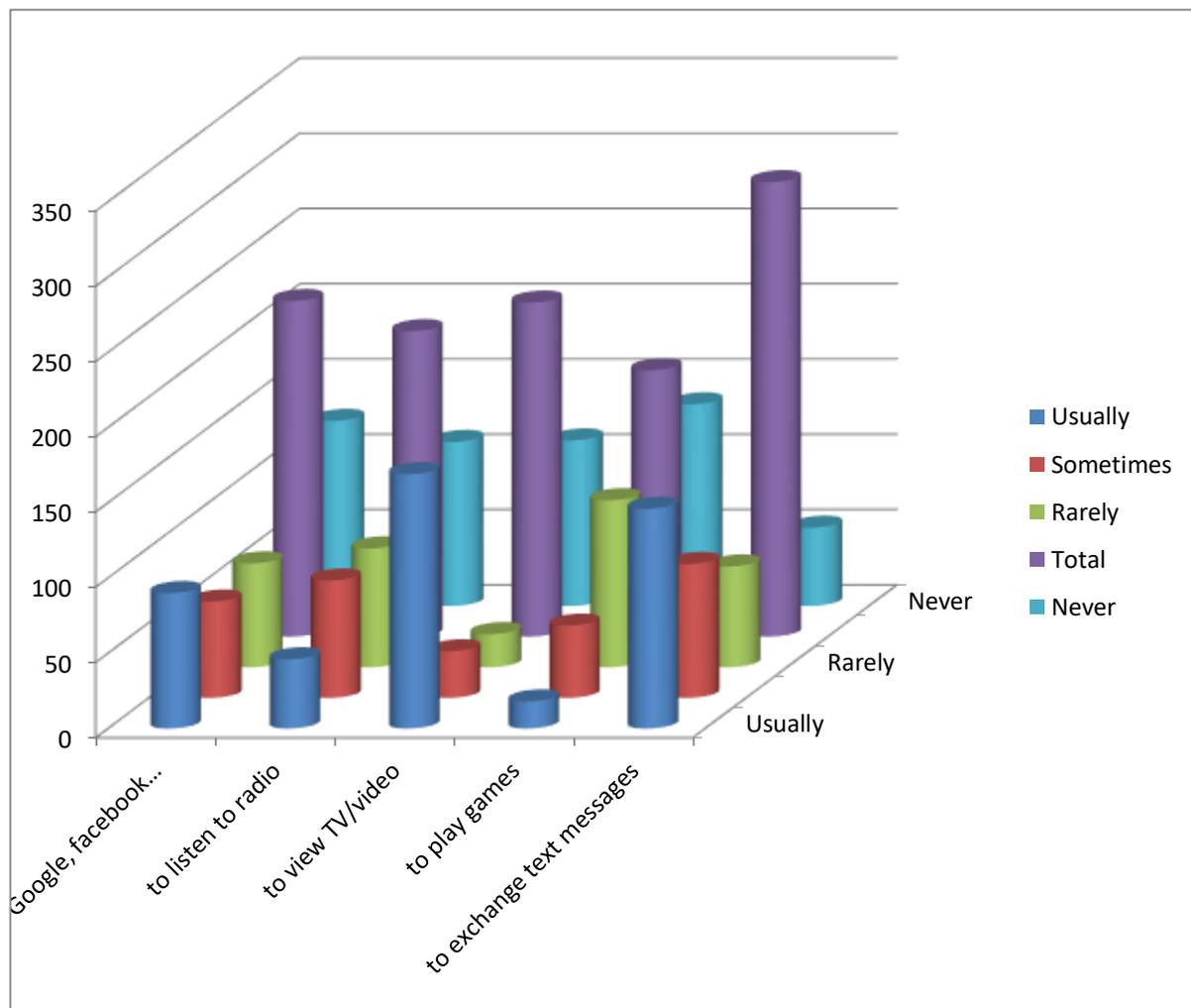


Figure 2: Shows the use of mobile phones among respondents.

THE USE OF WAGHIMRA COMMUNITY RADIO TO SUPPORT LOCAL DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

a. Access to New Information

Is Waghimra Community Radio able to assist the local community to acquire fresh information from time to time? From the 426 respondents of this research (see Figure 2), a little more than 36% of them believed that the Station managed to achieve this basic goal – letting the local people be informed. On the other hand, a significant number of respondents (28.2%) believed that the Station was not in a position to achieve this objective. Meanwhile, 31% of respondents were not willing to comment.

Those who believed that Waghimra Community Radio has helped its community to obtain fresh information were further asked to what extent it helps the community living in Seqota and its surrounding. The majority of them, (nearly 50%) put it at the ‘medium’ level while 34.4% replied that it is satisfactory (*high* and *very high* combined). On the other hand, almost a negligible number of respondents (nearly 16%, *low* and *very low* combined) disclosed that the extent Waghimra Community Radio helps the community to acquire new information for its audiences is small. Thus, standing from this, it is possible to conclude that though the station is serving its audiences to acquire new information, it is not yet managing to be in a position to satisfy the information need of its audience.

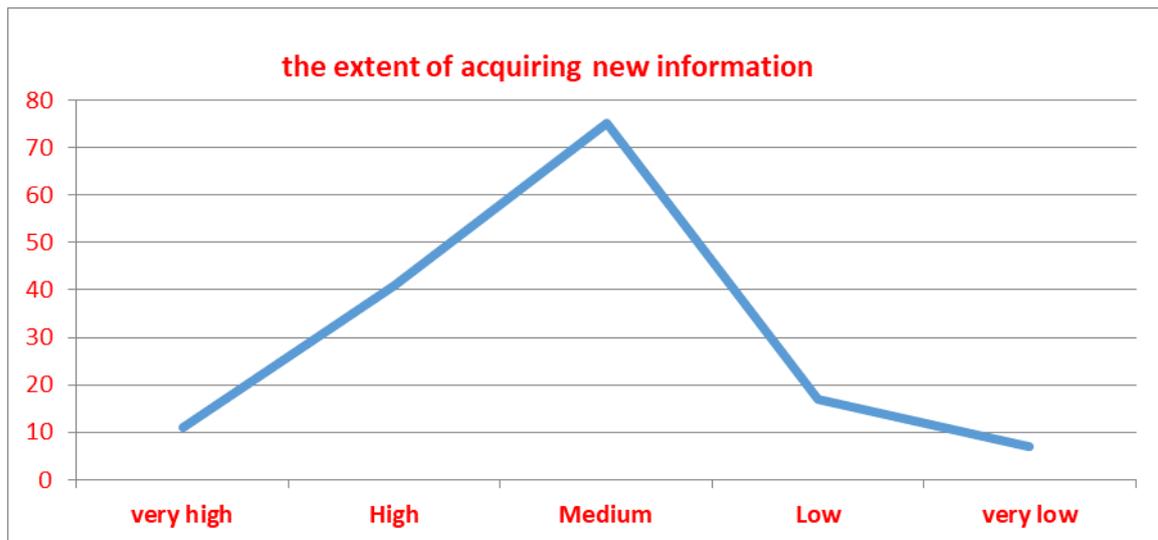


Figure 3: Shows the extent of acquiring new information.

b. Participation

The subject of this study is knowledgeable persons since they are educated civil servants working as junior and senior experts, researchers, consultants, teachers, and middle and lower level managers. It is, therefore, logical to expect them to have a good participation in the production of programs for the Community Radio - the only radio station that operates in their locality. Based on this assumption, the study tried to uncover the level of civil servants' participation (see Figure 3).

More than 70% of respondents have never made any telephone call to or being contacted by Waghimra Community Radio via phone while 28.2% (120) of respondents disclosed that they have participated in the radio broadcast by providing their opinion via telephone. But those who wrote letters to the broadcasters or program producers are significantly low (4.5%). Because there are better ways to send messages easily and quickly (such as text messages (SMS), emails, mobile-phone calls, etc.), this might not be surprising.

On the other hand, only 6.8% of respondents have ever given interviews to the radio station. Since the subjects of this study are civil servants working in Seqota town, it incorporates the best knowledgeable sources and experts in that town. This finding implies that these sources were not appropriately used to inform and educate the public about various issues including health, agriculture, human right, etc.

c. The Participation of The Local People in Managing The Radio Station

One of the areas where real participation of members of a community becomes conspicuous is in the arena of the management of the Station which normally includes membership on the board. "The most developed form of participation is self-management of communication media. This principle implies the right to participation in the planning and production of media content" (Servaes, 2008). To check the extent of the participation of the local/ordinary people's participation at the level of management, respondents were asked how they assess the level of participation of the local people in managing Waghimra Community Radio Station.

54.7% of the respondents (*low* and *very low* combined) believed that the participation of the local people in managing the Station is insufficient while a negligible

(10.3%, *high* and *very high*, combined) number of respondents said that the participation is adequate. A little more than 28% of respondents, for their part, believed that the local community participation in managing the Station is '*medium*'.

This data is in agreement with the information acquired through an interview with the head of the radio station. He confirmed that from the seven board members three of them are government officials which include the chairperson who is the head of Security and Administration Department and the vice chairperson who is Head of Cooperatives of the Zone. Except one member (merchants' representative), the other members are also educated individuals (a teacher, physician, expert). The board members' arrangement has two problems: one – it is dominated by educating people; two – its leadership is controlled by persons who are politically assigned and/or affiliated to the ruling party. This is against the basic tenets and principles of community radio. Fraser and Estrada (2001, 16) insist, "Irrespective of formal ownership, the station's policies, management, and programming must be the responsibility of the community in order for it to be considered a true community radio. There will usually be a representative community committee or the Board of Directors to set overall policies..."

d. Discussion About Local Development Problems

As long as "It is a function of community radio to provide an independent platform for interactive discussion about matters and decisions of importance to its community" (Fraser and Estrada, 2001, 19), it is important to discern the role of Waghimra Community Radio in assisting the people living in Seqota and its surrounding to discuss about their own local development problems. From the total respondents, the majority of them (more than 60%) agreed that it did not manage to create a platform for its listeners to discuss their local development problems. A significant number of respondents (33.8%), on the other hand, agreed that the station has created a platform for its listener so that they can discuss their own local development problems. These respondents were further asked to what extent the radio station has assisted the public to discuss about its own local development problems. More than half of them (52.8%) confirmed that the level of its assistance is just only '*medium*'.

From the data, it is possible to infer that though it is not sufficient, the Station has a platform to discuss local development problems. The result indicates that the discussion program is less popular among the community.

e. Opening Forum for Democratic Dialogue

Respondents were asked whether they believe that the radio station managed to open a forum for democratic dialogue so that local government officials and the community can discuss freely about local development issues. Most of the respondents (60.6%) replied to the negative. It is only a little less than 30% of respondents who believed that the Station has opened a forum so that government officials and the community can discuss about local development issues.

Though the discussion forum has the most important role in community radio broadcasting, the data implies that it doesn't get the necessary attention in Waghimra Community Radio. Without such forum, "The notions of transparency and good governance" will unlikely take on new dimensions and will be hard for democracy to be reinforced (Ondobo, in Fraser & Estrada, 2001, iii).

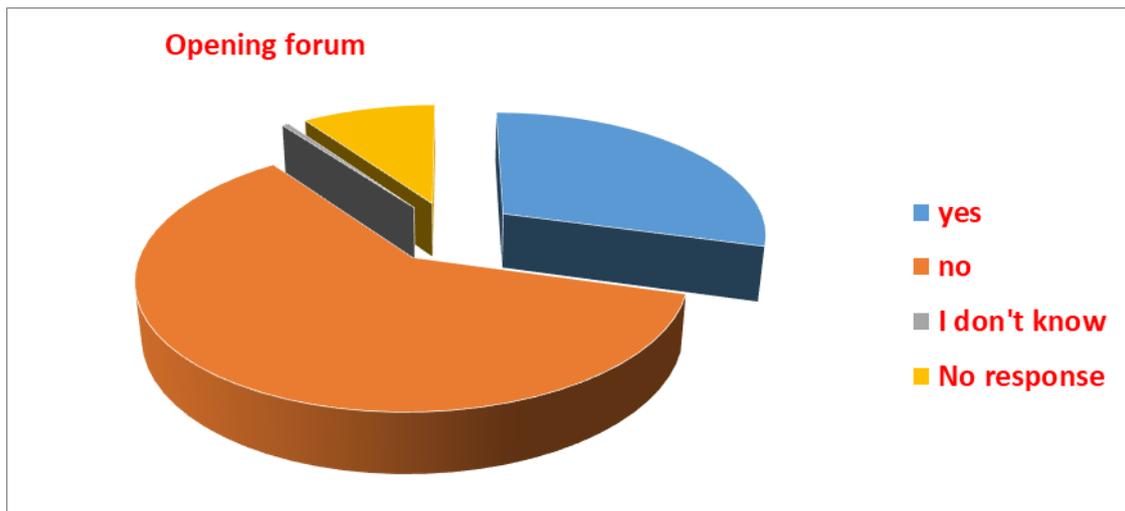


Figure 4: Shows use of the station to open forum among local officials and community members.

f. *The Agenda Setter*

As there will not be a media outlet operating without a purpose, there will not be a radio station broadcasting programs without an agenda. In short, the agenda of any broadcast system stems from its purpose and goals. Agenda setting is the process of featuring, emphasising and/or selecting “certain events, issues or sources to cover over others” (Nisbet, 2008, 140).

Look at Figure 4, the majority of respondents (37.8%) disclosed that they do not know who sets the agenda for Waghimra Community Radio while more than 35% respondents confirm that it is the Station’s reporters who set the agenda. Other respondent states that the agenda is set by the leaders of the Station, members of the board and government officials, 18.3%, 14.8%, and 11.7%, respectively.

Now the question is, “Why the majority of respondents said that they don’t know by whom the Station’s agenda is set?” As it has been discussed elsewhere in this study, many respondents have limited knowledge about the Station and the way it is working which is really very odd to a community radio that is expected not only to be listened but also to be produced and managed by ordinary people. The good news is that a significant number of respondents (35.4%) replied the Station’s agenda is set by reporters themselves which shows their good confidence and trust on the Stations freedom. Though this does not necessarily mean that the station has editorial independence from central and local government as long as the board is controlled by higher officials who are actively involved in the local political leadership. Community radio has to be “editorially independent of central and local government, of political parties, and of commercial and religious institutions in determining its policies and programming” (Fraser and Estrada, 2001, p. 17).

g. *Serving the Public Interest*

A community radio is established to serve the interests of its proprietor, i.e. the community. “A community radio station is one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community” (Tabing, 2002, 11). The ultimate goal of community radio is to support and bring about sustainable development and social change by serving the public interest of its community members. Thus, it is vitally important to explore whether this purpose is met.

The majority of respondents (51.2%) believed that Waghimra Community Radio has not yet served the public interest appropriately while about quarter of the respondents declined to give their opinion. Only almost a negligible number of respondents (16.2%) believed that the Station has served the public interest appropriately.

This data is another proof for the Station's being less successful in supporting the local development efforts in the struggle to bring social change by employing community media.

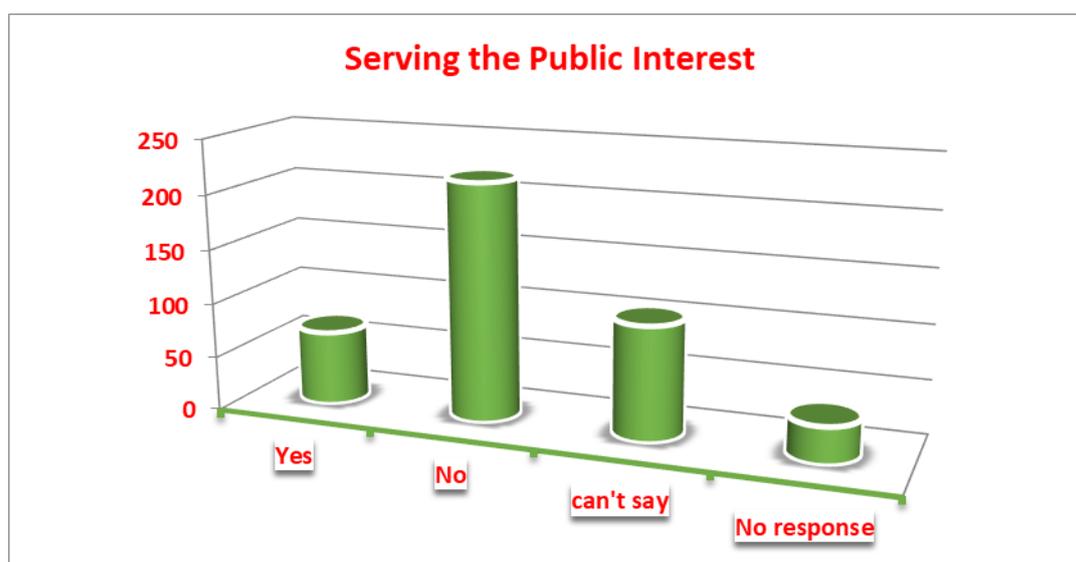


Figure 5: Shows to what interest the radio station served the public interest.

h. Major problems of Waghimra Community Radio

In Figure 5, 54% of respondents (*high, very high* combined) considered “*the reading of written materials*” (i.e. newspapers, magazines, etc.) on the air is the major problem of the Radio Station. Radio is a blind medium. As the newspaper is for the eye, radio is for the ear. The nature of radio imposes a distinct style of presentation. Radio programs have to be presented as a talk. No room for reading of texts. News stories or other written materials need to be written as a talk. “Writing in conversational style means writing for the ear” (White, 2005, 12).

If a radio station presents its programs without a conversational style, i.e. reads written materials (newspapers, magazines, etc.), what will happen? Thoughts cannot be “expressed quickly with brief, crisp, declarative sentences... If the audience does not understand the copy, nothing else matters” (White, 2005, 12).

The question is “why this is happening at the Waghimra Community Radio?” Some possible reasons can be drawn here. First, since the Station is a community radio, reporters lack professional qualification. Owing to this, they might read written materials without giving due consideration for the negative consequence. Second, poor understanding about the power of radio when it presents its programs in the form of talks, interviews, dialogues, etc; third, the laziness of practitioners to produce programs by exerting oneself; four, lack of training which can help to know the benefits and power of radio when it presents its programs in the form of conversations.

Nearly half of respondents (49.5%, *high, very high* combined) also believed that the exclusion of the rural areas from the coverage of the Station is the other major problem of

the Station. “Shortage of budget”, “lack of man power”, “giving more time for music” (39.2%, 33.8%, and 32.4%, respectively [*high, very high* combined]) are similarly regarded as part of the major problems of the Station.

In addition, “Lack of listeners’ participation” (27.5%), “lack of attention for local development” (27%), “the interruption of the broadcast repetitively” (25.6%) and “lack of quality of sound” (25.1%) are deemed as main problem of the Station. On the other hand, the number of respondents who considered the aforementioned problems as minor or insignificant is almost negligible (rages from 7% to 15% [*very low, low* combined]).

According to the information, which the researcher has obtained from the Head of the Waghimra Community Radio, the Station has interrupted its transmission four times since its establishment, from two months to more than one year, due to technical breakdown and it is currently not on the on-air. But it is only a relatively less number of respondents (25.6%) consider the recurring interruption of the broadcast as the major problem of the Station may be because, as it has been discussed elsewhere, the Station is not that much popular in the town where it is operating.

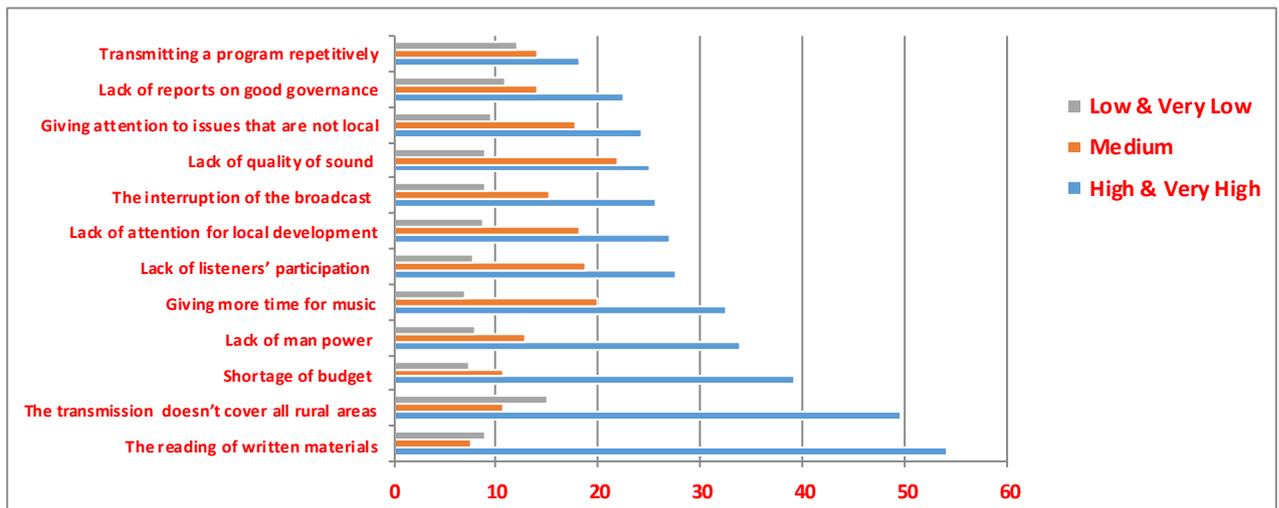


Figure 6: Shows major problems of Waghimra Community Radio.

i. Undue Interference of the Government

In Figure 6, nearly 42% of respondents (*low, very low* combined) disclosed that undue interference of the government is inconsiderable while a little more than 27% of respondents (*high, very high* combined) revealed that the interference is enormous. 20% respondents stated that the degree of interference of the local government is moderate. When the replies of respondents who said the undue interference is *very high, high* and *medium* are added up together (47%), it gives a better picture about the undue interference of the local government.

j. Voice for the Voiceless

One of the general objectives of a community radio is “to give voice to the people who normally have no access to the mass media nor opportunity to express their views on community development” (Tabing, 2002, 26). Is this objective achieved or not? To know this, respondents were asked whose voices were frequently aired on the Radio Station. The

tenets of community radio recognize voicelessness, which eventually leads to powerlessness, as key dimensions of poverty (AMARC, 2007).

According to 50.2% of respondents, the voices of the people who live in the town have been frequently presented. 41% of respondents, on the other hand, revealed that it is the voice of reporters that has been presented frequently while nearly 38% of respondents believed that it is the voices of government officials that have been frequently aired. Nearly 34% of respondents stated that the voice of various experts has dominated the airtime. Ruralists (26%), artists (25.3%) and investors (23.4%) received a relatively low coverage.

As long as a community radio is established to provide an ample chance for those who are voiceless in the mainstream media, the airwaves of community radio have to be mainly dominated by the voice of the ordinary people. The finding of this research, as it is discussed above, points out that it is only a little more than half of respondents (50.2%) believed that the Waghimra Community Radio manages to be a voice for the voiceless people. On the other hand, a significant number of respondents (41%) believed that the voice of reporters has dominated the airwaves.

The high presence of the voice of reporters (41%), local government officials (nearly 38%) and experts (nearly 34%) on-air can be considered as a potential threat for a community radio. Thus, though there is an indication that the station is trying to follow some of the tenet of community radio, for instance to be a voice for the voiceless, it is hard to conclude that the Station is following it fully or appropriately.

k. The Benefit of Expansion of Community Radio

The respondents, who are an educated group of the community, were asked if community radio is established in other rural areas of the Zone (such as Dihana, Abergele, etc. districts) to what extent it will benefit the society. About 69% (*high, very high* combined) of respondents have shown great expectation for community radio to benefit its respective community. It is only a negligible number of respondents (13.6%, *very low* and *low* combined; 11.3%, *medium*) who put the benefit of community radio as less important in the other rural or district areas of Waghimra.

Though majority of respondents (more than 51%) believe that Waghimra Community Radio did not serve the public interest, a great majority of respondents (69%) have the full trust on the potential of community radio to serve its community social, political and economic development or in short for social change.

CONCLUSIONS

Community radios are the best alternative to assist sustainable development efforts by helping self-expression of local people who are often left as voiceless especially by the mainstream media. Currently 16 community radios are operating in Ethiopia which is a golden opportunity to use the medium as a means of social, economic and political development in the country. But as long as community radio is a new media culture in Ethiopia, it is clear that the stations will encounter various problems.

A good example here is Waghimra Community Radio. Although it is helping people in Seqota town, who are isolated from much of infrastructure facilities including access to media outlets, as it has been unearthed by this research, it has also many problems. As a novice, some or much of the problems can be something to be expected. But it is crucially important to sort out the problems simply because it is difficult for the Station to meet its

main objective. It would be very much difficult for the Station to serve as a tool of social change or development, unless the major problems have been solved.

Based on the major findings that have been obtained from the study, the following recommendations are suggested. First and foremost, Waghimra Community Radio needs to promote itself to the Seqota residents by producing programs that are appealing and inspire greater interest. Publicity is also a good alternative, for instance by using the local traditional media.

In addition, since community participation at various levels (program production, reporting, managing the station, etc.) is the heart of community radio, the Station leaders have to give due attention for the genuine involvement and active participation of the local people. Some mechanisms have to be designed in order to secure community participation. First, the Station managers have to open the door for genuine participation. They need to invite the local people to come to the station and be involved in the production of programs (of course after a short-term training) and then, launch new radio programs with various formats (dialogue, question and answer, puzzles and quizzes, spots, etc.) (Tabing, 2002).

The way the station is currently managed does not allow it to follow the basic tenets and principles of community radio. Thus, the Station Board need to be restructured so that it can be lead and controlled by members of ordinary people; not by political leaders to ensure the editorial independence of the Waghimra Community Radio, assuring that the very basic ownership of the radio system, is upheld.

Furthermore, governmental, non-governmental and private organizations need to support the Station so that to resolve the constraints related to financial problems, technical breakdown and lack of manpower and training. It is a good idea if the Ethiopian Broadcasting Authority, the one who gives the license for community broadcasting, assists community radios in obtaining funds to sort out their technical, financial and manpower problems. Waghimra Community Radio's sustainability is unlikely except it is possible to secure some sort of support.

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