

Stakeholders call for transparent, less rigorous broadcast licensing process

Stakeholders in the broadcast industry in Nigeria have called for a less rigorous licensing process and the granting of full licensing power to the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) among other recommendations.

Stakeholders in the broadcast industry in Nigeria met on January 26, 2010 as part of the process of producing a policy instrument for the broadcasting sector in Nigeria.

The meeting tagged National Broadcasting Policy Stakeholders' Forum was organized by the National Broadcasting Commission, (NBC), Nigeria's broadcast industry regulators. It took place at the State House Annex auditorium, in the Asokoro District of Abuja.

Participants were drawn from broadcast operators, industry and professional groups, regulatory agencies, government bodies, academia and constituencies. The event was chaired by renowned communication scholar, Prof. Alfred Opubor.

Alhaji Ibrahim Najume, the Chairman of the NBC Board said in his welcome address said



Eng. Yomi Bolarinwa, DG of National Broadcasting Commission (NBC)

the broadcast policy-making exercise was anchored on the statutory responsibility of the NBC to advise government on the implementation of the National Mass Communication Policy with particular reference to broadcasting. He added that the desire of the government to place Nigeria among the 20

strongest economies of the world by the year 2020 had made it imperative to have a carefully articulated policy document on broadcasting.

He said the policy expected from the process should define the character of Nigerian broadcasting, address issues of national interest and "guarantee equitable access to the largest and the smallest population segment in Nigeria". He added he expected the policy to put Nigerian broadcasting in a position to march international standards while taking full advantage of ever evolving technologies. Engineer Yomi Bolarinwa, the Director General of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), his keynote address said in view of the socio-political, economic and technological changes which had occurred since the deregulation of broadcasting in 1992, it was appropriate to develop a well-articulated policy framework which would accommodate existing changes and address shortcomings in order to place the broadcast industry within appreciable global standards. He warned broadcasting stations that their duty to educate, inform and entertain should not be at the expense of national interest, unity and cohesion. He said that any station that violated the provisions of the Nigeria

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Seminar asks government to expedite formulation of broadcast

Participants at a two day seminar on 'developing community radio in Nigeria' have called on the government of Nigeria to expedite action to conclude the policy processes it has initiated for the development of a plural broadcasting landscape.

Organized by the Nigeria community Radio coalition, the seminar had a ten-point objectives among which were to better understand community radio as an institution; to generate advocacy strategies for community radio; to enlist more hands in the advocacy and community capacity building; to study and appropriate what is happening to community radio in other countries and to make community radio happen rapidly in Nigeria.

Dr. Tunde Adegbola, executive Director of African Languages Technology Initiative in

his presentation started by saying Nigeria is the only country in ECOWAS where community radio does not operate. He differentiated three tiers of radio broadcasting. These are state, commercial, and community radio. Starting from Nigeria's next door neighbor, Dr. Adegbola listed the countries within the West African sub region and the status of

community radio in these countries. In a summary, he said in virtually all West African countries, except Nigeria, community radio is active, thriving, and powerful.

As a result of the thriving community radio sector in West Africa, he said the Open Society for West Africa (OSIWA) set up a network of community radio the sub region with its hub in Dakar, Senegal. The network called West Africa democracy radio, he said has correspondents across West Africa and news are collated and distributed across the sub region to the radio station in the network which broadcast them in their locality. He said during the trial of Charles Taylor in The Hague, OSIWA paid for a correspondent in The Hague who filed daily reports of the trials that were aired across West Africa and then feed back were collected from these countries and aired across the sub region on



Participants at the Seminar on Building Community Radio in Nigeria, which held in Akure, in a group photograph

the matter.

In his paper "Issues in the Nigerian broadcasting Environment" Mr. Akin Akingbulu took participants through the laws and policy on broadcasting and how they deal with community radio. He said there were ample laws and policies that support community radio but the President needs to give the necessary approval before it can take off in Nigeria. On the strategies for Advocacy and Community Capacity Building, he said the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition works with the World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC) and Panos Institute in Dakar to build capacity on community radio.

Mrs. Sade Taiwo in her presentation also dwelt on community radio, gave a summary of the legal, policy and regulatory environment

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Broadcasting Code in the coverage of elections and crises would face full sanctions of the law.

Prof. Opubor implored participants to make inputs that would enrich the policy process, stressing that the document which would emerge should address challenges and help stakeholders understand the realities of broadcasting in Nigeria and reflect global developments. He also assured that the meeting would take all contributions and later sift the ones that would be useful for policy.

The Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON), in its presentation recommended that the process of issuing radio and television licences should be less rigorous and that the NBC Act of 1999 should be amended so that the Minister of Information and Communication should be the final approving authority. It also noted that the current process of allocating radio and television licences, has stifled the growth of Community Radio stations, which is quite developed in most African countries.

The Nigeria Community Radio Coalition (NCRC) recommended that broadcasting policy should recognize a three sub-sector structure in broadcasting comprising the public, commercial and community sub sectors; licence for community broadcasters should be free, without prejudice to reasonable processing levies; ownership of stations by religious organization

should be treated on a case-by-case basis; the NBC should have full licencing powers, that is, from the point of receiving application to that of issuing licence approval; licencing process renewal of licences should be open, involving a public hearing; and that applicants denied licences should receive official explanation and unsuccessful applicants should be able to exercise a right of appeal to an administrative body (a higher level within the regulatory body) or a judicial body (the court of law).

Further recommendations made by the NCRC were that there should be a converged independent regulatory body whose terms of reference will cover both broadcasting and telecommunication whose functions will cover the whole gamut of regulation, to include final power to approve licences. It added that appointment process of members into its governing board and that of its chief executive should be transparent, and by the National Assembly to which it reports directly

NCRC also suggested that government broadcasters should be transformed into public broadcasters; be guaranteed management and editorial independence and be subject to better public oversight; and removed from the civil service structure among others.

For Community Broadcasters, NCRC suggested their board and management should be composed of community members; they should be registered as legal "not-for-profit",

non-governmental entities with ownership primarily drawn from people and organizations in the locality to be served; and should serve communities in rural, sub-urban and urban grassroots.

NCRC also made recommendations in the areas of funding and sustainability, research and capacity building, and legal environment.

The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) recommended, among other things that the policy should discourage multiple regulators and multiple taxation; licensing process should be within the jurisdiction of the regulator; convergence should be addressed, to include issues like internet broadcasting; the policy should provide clear guidelines for review of the policy itself and should recognize an independent regulator

There were also presentations from radio and television broadcasters, Nigerian Film & Video Census Board (NFVCB), cable TV operators, and the academia

The Chairman of the event, Prof. Opubor, thanked participants for their inputs, noting that the contributions straddled policy and operational issues. He assured all that the retreat (which would take place after the forum) would extract materials useful for policy, and ensure that the document to emerge would reflect the wishes of stakeholders.

Lagos NUJ demands community radio licence

The Lagos State Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) has added its voice to the advocacy for the licensing and operation of community radio in Nigeria. Mr. Wahab Oba, the Council chairman, during a visit to the Director General of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), Eng. Yomi Bolarinwa, in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, solicited his assistance in getting a community radio licence for the Lagos State Council of the NUJ which it plans to operate from Badagry.

Mr. Oba promised the Council will abide by the rule of the game if its demand for the licence is approved and expressed the Council's support for genuine efforts aimed at bringing more credibility to the industry without unnecessary intervention from government. He promised the station will give credible voice to the community.

The Chair also informed Eng. Bolarinwa that the Lagos NUJ council has been given the consent of the Badagry community to cite the station there. He said: "Our aim, as a social engineer, is to complement various efforts by the Lagos State government to develop the rural communities and especially bring the culture and tourist potentials of the people of Badagry to the front burners."

The NBC assured the Council it would be given high priority as soon as the Federal Executive Council gives approval for the licensing of community radio. Eng. Bolarinwa said that about 22 community radios, especially in the academic community were already licensed and are operating across the country adding that community radio service remains the best in the country because of its closeness and relevance to the grassroots. He maintained that as long as majority of the people do not have access to cable decoder services for first-hand information and educative data services, there is the need to ensure that various classes of people have unhindered access to radio services.

Reacting to allegations of irregular payment of salaries by media owners, Eng. Bolarinwa promised to use the power of the NBC to ensure that salaries and entitlements of journalists were paid when due. He gave assurance that the Commission has the will and capacity to hold media owners under its supervision accountable and responsible. He however, appealed to journalists to furnish the NBC with necessary information to enable it act promptly.

Panel on NPPJC Bill say parliament Lacks power to legislate on salaries

The Prince Tony Momoh led panel set up by the House of Representatives Committee on Information and National Orientation to review laws of the Nigeria Press Council (NPC), said the National Assembly lacked the power to fix salaries of journalists by legislation. Prince Momoh disclosed this on December 4, 2009 when the Committee presented its report to the House.

The panel comprising of representatives of Nigerian Newspapers Proprietors' Association of Nigeria (NPAN), Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON), Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), National Association of Journalism and Mass Communication Teachers, the Nigerian Press Council (NPC), the Ministry of Information and



Prince Tony Momoh

the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), was set up on November 16, 2009 and asked to draw up suggestions necessary for repealing the NPC Act of 1992.

It handed over the executive summary to the Acting Chairman of the House Committee on Information Khabeeb Mustafa. Prince Momoh, the head of the panel later told journalists that: "Media organisations in the country reserve the right of negotiation with their staff on salaries. The National Assembly cannot decide on the salaries media houses should pay their staff. It is unconstitutional for the National Assembly to do so."

Commending Mrs. Abike Dabiri-Erewa the sponsor of the bill, Prince Momoh, said the bill

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and concluded that they were not available for operating community radio in Nigeria. She also emphasized that only in Nigeria is community radio not in operation. She gave a success story about Radio Ada in Ghana which was used to successfully mobilize people for a cause.

The participants, while appreciating the reform efforts being made by the government of Nigeria on broadcasting in the areas of policies, laws and regulations, observed that Nigeria is however, the only country in the West Africa sub region where there is no community radio in the real sense of the word. They said in ECOWAS, community radio is helping the process of accelerating development in other parts of the world and has the potential of doing same in Nigeria.

They acknowledge the contributions of the nation's broadcast regulatory body, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), in putting in place a conducive environment for the implementation of community radio in Nigeria and particularly noted the cooperation of the NBC, the Federal Ministry of Information, National Assembly and the Presidency in

the efforts to make community radio a reality in Nigeria.

The seminar participants also noted that many communities across the country are going about the process of establishing their radio stations with passion, commitment and seriousness.

They called on the National Assembly to engage the policy processes of the executive agencies of government to fast-track the emergence of community radio stations in Nigeria.

The seminar also recommended that the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition (NCRC) should further strengthen its advocacy efforts by doing more mobilization at the community level; put in place appropriate mechanism to ensure community radios stations that would emerge truly belong to their communities.

The two-day event, organized by the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition with support from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom, drew participants from community based groups, civil society organizations, government agencies and other sectors.

Publishers, editors again reject government regulated-Press Council

The Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) and the Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE) have again restated their rejection of a government regulated press council as being canvassed through the Nigeria Press and Practice of Journalism Council Bill.



Our aim, as a social engineer, is to complement various efforts by the Lagos State government to develop the rural communities and especially bring the culture and tourist potentials of the people of Badagry to the front burners. **Wahab Oba, Chair, NUJ Lagos Council to Eng. Yomi Boarinwa when the Council demanded for a community radio licence**

Community radio is a necessary feedback channel for the broadcast sector. There are verifiable evidence that it is a purveyor of development, it is a channel that helps to disseminate and pass around development information. **Dr. Tunde Adegbola, Executive Director of African Languages Technology initiative in an interview with Media Vista**

I want to use this medium to warn all broadcasting stations that their duty to educate, inform and entertain shall not be at the expense of national interest, unity and cohesion.

Eng. Yomi Bolarinwa, DG of NBC at a stakeholders forum on broadcast policy

Expectedly, the policy should draw from our experiences, be responsive to the present and fully anticipate the future. Such a policy should put Nigerian broadcasting in a position to match international standards while taking full advantage of ever-evolving technologies. These are challenges that we must collectively discuss.

Ibrahim Najume, Chairman of the NBC Board at a stakeholders forum on broadcast policy



Chief Ajibola Ogunshola, President of the Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria

In rejecting the proposed law, Chief Ajibola Ogunshola, President of NPAN said the association believed that "the essential provisions of the bills are unconstitutional. It also resolved that the 2002 agreement among stakeholders on the press council bill had been overtaken by events with the establishment of the Ombudsman and the changed political climate and that the strategy of the association should be to resist the bill." He spoke on February 4, at the end of the Association's Annual General Meeting.

Chief Ogunshola said: "We had foreseen something sinister coming from the National Assembly, if you will recall that at the 2008 AGM, we had decided to be on the alert on the expected Press Council Amendment Bill being promoted by some members of the National Assembly as the bill would not be in the collective interest of our members."

"Yes, we expected something sinister but what eventually came out was outright poison. Not only was the bill unconstitutional, it went

as far as trying to usurp the powers of the media owners to fix salaries and conditions of service of their staff."

He vowed the NPAN will go to court "should the report of the Tony Momoh's stakeholders committee be passed the way it is, as it will stifle press freedom and the constitutional provisions that guarantee freedom to impact ideals and information."

The NGE reiterated its objection in a statement issued by the Guild President, Mr. Gbenga Adefaye, and Secretary-General, Mr. John Ndaokuba at the end of its one-day Standing Committee Meeting on February 5. The Guild also reiterated its objection to the criminal libel law and suggested that it be repealed like it was done in Ghana.

The Guild said the registration of journalists should be discouraged due to the precarious nature in our environment as it would be tantamount to licensing journalists. It also rejected the legislation of salaries and wages as proposed in the bill.

On the proposed registration of journalists as contained in the Press Council Bill, through the Nigerian Union of Journalists, the guild said it should be guided by Section 39 of the constitution which conforms with the provisions of the African Charter on Human Rights.

The statement reads, "The guild acknowledged the need for regulation. However, the guild restates its rejection of any effort to have a government-regulated NPC

The editors condemned the deliberate and continued effort of members of the House of Representatives to frustrate the passage of the Freedom of Information bill, saying it would keep a watch-list of members in the House who have elected to deny the people their right to know.

Parliament Lacks power to legislate on salaries

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was a good effort, but contained clauses that betrayed some fear on the part of politicians for the press, observing however that the fear of the press was misplaced, as what the sector seeks is respect and not apathy from the political class.

He said "Abike Dabiri did a wonderful job of sponsoring the bill, but the lawmakers and politicians in the country should not be afraid of the media.

"We the media are very powerful, but people should not be afraid of us, not fear us. What we should be working for is respect."

Kabeeb commended the committee for an "exciting discussion on the bill, and a painstakingly piecing together of research papers on the way forward for the media in Nigeria." He promised his committee would promptly "include the amendments to the clauses in the committee's report.

Representatives of the Newspapers Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) did not sign the report

'Community radio is a necessary feedback channel for the broadcast sector'

Dr. Tunde Adegbola is Executive Director of African Languages Initiative and a member of the steering committee of NCRC. He spoke with Media Vista on issues surrounding community radio

What are the objectives of the ALT Initiative?

Basically, the fundamental objectives of the initiative are to ensure that all information communication Technologies are usable in African Languages. As we go further into the information age, more and more of human interactions will be mediated by machines.

This will bring about, first and foremost, the need to use machines to talk, to communicate to other human. But more importantly, it will also bring about the need to communicate with machines. Africa speaks about one-third of all the languages spoken in the world, there must be attention paid to making it possible to use these technologies in African languages to be able to communicate with each other, using machines through African languages.

At what point then did you get interested and involved in the community radio initiative?

It is a kind of multi-cued propensity because, to start with, my background is in broadcasting. I was for many years working in the broadcast industry. I worked for many years in radio, worked for many years in television basically as an engineer. And it got to a point when things were almost at their lowest ebb in Nigeria in the Babangida years, when we started broadcasting using VHS and VHS, if you must know stands for Video Home System. But as I continued in my foray into information technology, two things happened. The first thing was that there was a gradual convergence of information technologies and broadcasting. Secondly, Nigeria started thinking about deregulating broadcasting. So I thought, maybe, there was still life in broadcasting, if the industry were to be deregulated. So, I gradually worked my way back into consultancy in broadcasting and I started by working very closely with the Nigerian home video industry and the famous Nollywood. That is my background in broadcasting and I still continue to do more in the industry.

One of the areas that I saw I can use my area of technology is in the area of language. There was convergence at the level of computing, broadcasting and telecommunications, but for me, there was also convergence in the whole idea of using machines as tools for the management, creation, and dissemination of information, so for me, convergence was at two levels and this is how my interest in broadcasting and my interest in language converged naturally because radio is one information technology that does not require of the user to learn a new language. Naturally, I saw radio as a very powerful information communication technology that takes cognizance of language



Rr. Tunde Adegbola at a seminar on developing community radio in Nigeria

and doesn't require of people to go and learn any language because to be able to use computer you either have to learn English or French or one of the European Languages, but for the radio, you don't need to adapt your language.

So I saw the movement for community radio as a very important movement that can make ICT available to our people without having to modify their ways of life but can adopt and appropriate into our own life styles and use them to make our living a lot more efficient. At the philosophical level, this is how I arrived at the advocacy for community radio.

Do you think Nigeria is losing anything not operating community radio?

Of course, Nigeria is losing a lot; first and foremost, Nigeria is not truly, part of the globalizing world. We may be accepted as part of the globalizing world, because we supply petroleum, to fuel globalization, but that is not what it means to be part of a movement. What it means to be part of globalization is to contribute, because globalization is fuelled primarily by information, knowledge, content, know-how and we as a people, with all the vast resources we have in cultural products, with the vast realities of our cultural diversity, we are not equipped to contribute meaningfully into the globalization world. But with community radios, even people in very small hamlets and villages in the remotest parts of Nigeria will have the advantage of using the technology of radio as the means of extending the reach of their voices. They also can make statements and contribute to the process of globalization. That is one fundamental way we are losing.

Secondly, we are losing because some of the interesting information networks that are growing around community radio, growing around using radio as a means of enhancing human interactions, we are losing.

Let us even look at the etymology of the world community. It we take the word "Penalty", it is making penal, penalisation to a noun. So 'community' is about communing, it is about communication. So how can we have communities that are systematically, and

structurally starved of the capacity to communicate. And that is what we do by not operating community broadcasting in Nigeria. We are, intentionally, by government fiat withdrawing the capacity to commune, to communicate and thereby be communities in that sense.

If you were to have the opportunity to speak to the Chief executive at the Presidency, who can liberalise community radio operation, what will you tell him?

First, I will explain to him the rationale of community broadcasting, the philosophical position that community is a group of people who are communicating and that it will not be right to deny them the facilities that will make their communication efficient and effective thereby productive.

Secondly, I will point out that community radio provides a necessary feedback in the broadcast sector. You know broadcasting was a one-way communication process; whereas communication cannot be said to be effective and complete if there is no avenue for feedback, so, in the broadcasting terrain, community radio is the veritable feedback channel. When FRCN says something, it is from the community radio that you will get reply or the demand for further clarification. When you and I speak, I ask "do you mean...?", you say "No, I don't mean..." that is how we get to understand each other, because human language incorporates ambiguities and if we don't have the benefit of a feedback channel we miss a lot, we misinform, we disinform.

I will let the president know that community radio is a necessary feedback channel for the broadcast sector.

But more importantly, I will let the President know that there are verifiable evidence that community broadcast is a purveyor of development, that it is a channel that helps to disseminate and pass around development information. I will let the President know that as of today, there is a big land mass of Nigeria in which the only broadcast signal that they receive comes from outside Nigeria because and FM station ideally covers a radius of 100 to 200km. So if you look at the radio coverage of Nigeria today, with the FM stations that are largely in city centres, then you are talking of about 100 to 200 km radius of the city centres. So there is a large land mass of Nigeria that the only radio signals they get are from BBC, VOA, and RFI etc. so how does government get these people to get involved in development processes? It is by virtue of taking advantage of the technology that now makes it possible for somebody to put a radio in his bedroom and speak to his locality and we are not saying that to be abusing the airwaves and of course we expect that the NBC will do a good job of managing the airwaves. What we are saying is that we should not erect these structural impediments in the way of people from communicating as a community is a collection of communicating people.

Published by Nigeria Community Radio Coalition

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