

Government Urged to Adopt National Communication Policies

Community radio advocates and stakeholders have called on the Federal Government of Nigeria to act expeditiously to adopt the draft reviewed National Communication Policy and the Community Radio Policy, and give appropriate directives to the regulatory body to licence grassroots community radio stations.

The Nigerian Community Radio Stakeholders held a three-day Conference in Makurdi, Benue State, from November 23 to 25, 2009 as part of the struggle to sensitize and mobilize stakeholders and heighten advocacy to address the yawning gaps in the Nigerian broadcasting landscape that were and are still undermining democratic participation and efforts at national development.

The Conference, which theme was “Strengthening Advocacy, Re-energizing Community Capacity Building”, was organized by the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition (NCRC) with the support of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, United Kingdom

Participants at the conference were unanimous that community radio is the most effective medium of mass communication for driving such development projects as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Vision 2020 and the Seven-Point Agenda of the Federal Government because of its immediacy, simplicity, participatory nature, use of indigenous and other community languages, and ability to reach large audiences.

They acknowledged positive actions of the Federal Government and the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), in granting 27 licenses to campus communities, but expressed serious concern over Federal Government’s slow pace in the overall process of allowing Nigerian grassroots communities to own community radio structures.

They noted that Nigeria is the only country in West Africa that does not have community radio structures and therefore does



(L - R) Steve Buckley, Mrs. Hanatu Ibrahim, Prof Alfred Opubor, Mr. E. Agbegir at the Conference

not benefit from the advantages of dialogue and popular participation which are important ingredients in democracy and development.

The Conference also asked the NBC to ensure that license for community radio is issued free of financial cost and that minimal charges are required for renewal and other administrative matters; issue guidelines on equipment specification and standardization on community radio in line with UNESCO Training Manual Specification and the principles set out by the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC).

The conference asked the NCRC to list all legislation that constitute obstacles to community radio development and sustenance or undermine the effectiveness of regulatory bodies, with a view to taking steps to address them and to develop a process of appropriate community ownership of community radio structures.

They urged Campus Radio Operators to develop a business plan and establish appropriate governance or management structures that are

representative of their communities, while at the same time guaranteeing the editorial independence of the campus radio stations under their control; and ensure that their radio stations operate in line with professional standards and best global practices.

They also urged all freedom of expression stakeholders to intensify advocacy for the passage of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill into law by the National Assembly and assent by Mr. President.

The Conference was attended by participants drawn from Ministries, Departments and other agencies of Government; traditional rulers and other community leaders; the academia; Nigeria Union of Journalists; campus radio operators; community development associations; advocates of community radio and development communication; development partners; World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC); and other stakeholders.

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Prominent Nigerians Clamour for the Passage of FOI Bill

Recent calls on the National Assembly by several prominent Nigerians and groups for the passage of the Freedom of Information Bill underscore the importance of openness, transparency and accountability in a democracy. Both chambers of the National Assembly have also come out to assure Nigerians that the Bill is not dead and that it would be passed, but they are yet to convince Nigerians otherwise.

Among those who have called on the National Assembly to pass the FOI Bill are Mrs. Farida Waziri, Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC);

Prof. Pat Utomi, Director of the Lagos Business School; and Justice Mustapha Akanbi, the former chairman of the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related Offences Commission (ICPC). Also, participants at the 31st Senior Executive Course of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru in Plateau State, and Media Stakeholders at a Seminar on Media Self Regulation also lent their voices to these calls.

Speaking at a lecture in honour of

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Clamour for Passage of FOI

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the late governor of the defunct Bendel State, Prof. Ambrose Ali, on October 14, 2009 in Benin City, Mrs. Farida Waziri called on the National Assembly to pass the freedom of Information Bill without further delay. She said: "Information must be made available to the people, especially the non-state actors, for enhanced engagement with leadership."

"May I ... call on the National Assembly to promptly consider the passage of the FOI bill presently before it to further empower the people to demand accountability from their leaders."

She stressed that a legal regime of access to information would enhance EFCC's anti-corruption crusade and check corruption in Nigeria.

Prof. Pat Utomi argued that an FOI law in place will help to monitor budget implementation and subsequently improve its performance. He made the statement on November 13, at the Senate Annual retreat which held in Enugu, South-east Nigeria.

On November 17, participants at the 31st Senior Executive Course of the National Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, at a meeting with President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua recommended the passage of the FOI Bill saying that the non-passage of the Bill was aiding corruption in public places. The recommendation was contained in a paper presentation entitled "Good governance as a pre-requisite for the realization of Vision 2020 and Seven-Point Agenda."

They said: "Lack of transparency aids corruption, slows down progress, destroys morals and promotes violence," adding "The level of accountability and responsiveness of Nigerian government officials is low and the institutional framework in place to ensure strict compliance is weak."

Justice Mustapha Akanbi asked the National Assembly to pass the Bill without delay, to strengthen accountability in public life.

Speaking at an event organized by the National League of Veteran journalists in Ilorin, Kwara State on December 14, Justice Akanbi said: "In fairness to the media, the journalist of today is operating within a difficult environment where access to information is not guaranteed; where law enforcement agencies are often uncooperative; and where government officials can often be hostile."

"I believe that this is why there is the clamour for the passage of the FOI Bill. In this regard, it is my hope that the government will heed the call for the passage of the bill to strengthen the hands of journalists."

With continued pressure being mounted on members of the National Assembly, they have also come out to assure Nigerians that the Bill is not dead and that it will be passed in due time.

The Chairman of the House Committee on Media and Public Affairs, Hon. Esemey Eyibo assured Nigerians that the FOI Bill is not dead and that it will be passed into law. In the same vein, the spokesman of the Senate, Ayogu Eze said that the senate was committed to passing the FOI Bill.

All Set for Grant of Community Radio Licences

Every structure that needs to be put in place for licences to be granted for the operation of community radio in Nigeria is in place, so says Mr. Mark Ojiah, the Director of Broadcasting Policy and Research of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC). He said: "Mr. President and the NBC are making every effort in making sure that the third tier in broadcasting, which is the community radio comes on stream in Nigeria very soon."

Community radio advocates under the aegis of Community Radio Coalition have expressed fear that the promise of granting community radio licences may not manifest in the nearest future. They pointed out that with the federal government working towards the bidding process and the granting of private radio and television network licences, the voice of commerce was going to swallow the voice of the people and development. The coalition said in addition that the planned licensing of private networks "is potentially in conflict with community radio development, since a national radio network will require about 2MHz of FM spectrum across the country."

The coalition also argued that if it takes the approval of only President Musa Yar'Adua to license private radio and television networks, they cannot understand why it is taking the NBC so long to license community radio in spite of all assurance that the NBC was working with government to establish a framework for licensing community radio.

To dispel the fears of stakeholders, the director general of the

NBC, Engineer Yomi Bolarinwa said that in addition to strongly identifying with the Coalition, it has prepared a solid foundation for the eventual take off of the project.

He displayed a copy of the latest edition of the Nigerian Broadcasting Code which has a full chapter on community broadcasting. He said of the Code: "this document came out in 2006, a whole chapter is devoted to community broadcasting. What does it tell you? That the NBC, as far back as then, was prepared for licensing community radio, because the code is the major instrument for regulating broadcasting content in Nigeria and it has already taken care of it. If we license a community radio today, we already have the standards documented"

Engineer Bolarinwa drew attention to the fact that the 1999 Constitution empowers only the President to approve the grant of broadcast licences and that in the light of this, the spirit and letters of the 1999 Constitution must be followed. He added that the Act establishing the NBC gives it the duty of an adviser to the federal government in matters of broadcasting.

The DG said the campaign for community radio has not been abandoned because of the pressure of network licence. He stated that for the NBC, licensing community radio and seeing it operate is its first priority but cautioned that it won't do it the wrong way. He said "We take the job seriously, and we want to do it right and hit the ground running. It is not something we want to do and go back to the drawing board several times. if we do it and get

NUJ to Insure Journalists, Ensure Better Pay

The Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) is putting machinery in motion to give all practising journalists life insurance while also threatening to shut down newspaper houses that default in the payment of salaries of journalists.

Speaking at the third Triennial Delegates Conference of the NUJ, Borno State Council, the NUJ National President, Mallam Mohammed Garba, said the insurance policy for journalists became imperative in view of the hazards associated with the discharge of the functions and to ensure accountability and transparency in governance.

Mohammed explained that the move to introduce and implement insurance schemes for practicing journalists was because of the hazards journalists face which threaten both the profession and the lives of reporters.

He disclosed that the NUJ had contacted ten media houses, both in print and electronics, to implement the insurance scheme and serve as a pilot for others.

Rising from its National Executive Council (NEC) meeting in Akure, Ondo State on December 6, 2009, NUJ decried the poor

remuneration of practicing journalists and called on operators of the industry to raise the standard of the wages of practitioners to be commensurate with the enormous task and risk



Mallam Mohamed Garba,
NUJ Nat'l President

they take in the course of duty.

Mallam Garba said the matter was very worrisome because proprietors of these media houses are making enough profits to pay regular salaries to workers, yet not more than four newspaper houses pay regularly.

He said: "We have it on good authorities that not more than four newspaper houses for instance, are actually paying salaries of their workers regularly while many had not paid their workers for months.

He threatened that "We will ... be forced to picket media houses" and seal off those consistently owing journalists arrears of salaries."

AMARC Seminar Commends Standards Setters

The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) in Paris on November 11, 2009, commended countries that set standards in the operations of community radio while acknowledging some of the challenges faced by community radio.

AMARC, in collaboration with UNESCO brought in experts, development partners and stakeholders to discuss case examples of good practices in policy, law and regulation; in sustainability and growth; and in social impact at a one-day international seminar on "Voice and empowerment through community media: learning from good practice, strategies for development".

Participants analysed some of the key characteristics of good practices in community media and assessed some of the challenges of transferability, adaptability and scalability in order to form joint strategies for community media development



Steve Buckley, President of AMARC

They commended countries which have demonstrated a sustained commitment to policies, laws and regulations that positively enable and support community broadcasting. Such policies include independent regulatory bodies, recognition of community broadcasting as a distinct sector, public

funding arrangements, and the absence of licence fees. Countries that fall in this category are France and South Africa.

The seminar also recognized, in experience, Nepal and other countries the importance of effective country level associations to defend and advocate for the community broadcasting sector

They noted that, though, community media often exist in economically precarious conditions and are vulnerable to external pressures such as economic, political, social change and new media development, they recognize that the sustainability of community media is often linked to the strength of their social base and community participation.

Participants called on AMARC to continue to promote and defend community media sector, support country level and international advocacy, networking, and knowledge sharing etc and UNESCO to continue, as a priority, to provide direct support to innovative and strategic initiatives. It called for encouragement and facilitation of community media to sustainable development and human rights through partnership and strategic support from others.



Given Nigeria's enormous size, wide diversity and remarkable plurality as well as her economic prospects, NBC has determined that it is feasible, desirable and indeed imperative to increase the number of broadcast networks in the country.

Mr. Yomi Bolarinwa, DG of NBC at a press conference in Abuja on September 3, 2009

As soon as the private people are also given the opportunity to have their own licences, NBC will ensure that except you have a network licence, you cannot network your programme across the country.

Mr. Yomi Bolarinwa, DG of NBC in an interview with the News Agency of Nigeria on October 21, 2009

The point of the FOI Bill is equality of citizenship. Far from undermining it, the Bill advances state security. Advocates for the FOI bill accept the existence of a state security imperative, part of an intangible infrastructure for the defence of the public interest, entirely compatible with democratic openness. The real obstacle to unlocking the present impasse over the FOI Bill is the refusal of self-appointed sentinels of state security in and outside the legislature to acknowledge this. The lesson of defence off the Realm is clearly that this refusal is neither justified nor sustainable.

Dr. Chidi Odinkalu, in an article entitled "10 years of Nigeria's FOI Bill" published in The Guardian of October 19, 2009.

What the colonialists tried to do but failed under the Newspaper Ordinance of 1903; what our politicians tried to do in 1964 but failed; and what the Buhari/Idiagbon regime and a succession of military dictatorship tried to do but all failed, is now being put forward again. As it was in the past, I am confident that the press will, once again, outlive the sponsors of the vexatious bill. I urge them to stand aside, reflect a little, bend down a bit and drink from the well of history.

Chief Ajibola Ogunshola, President of NPAN and Chairman of the Punch newspapers, on the proposed journalism bill

BON Takes Stock ahead Digitization Challenge

Members of the Broadcasting Organisation of Nigeria (BON) took stock of the challenges of the digitization deadline urging the Federal Government to expedite action on the report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Digitization. They spoke at the organisation's 51st General Assembly held in Lagos in December 2009.

They also resolved to demand a road map from the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) on the digital transition to guide member stations and their owners and to ensure that NBC writes state governors to facilitate the funding of the digital transition.

BON members devoted the General Assembly to deliberate on, among other issues, how to actualize the 2012 digital transmission deadline: it had the theme "Countdown to 2012: Mid Term Peer Review on Digital Transmission."

They urged members to prepare adequately for the forth-

coming 2010 FIFA World Cup while commending members for the success recorded in the transmission of FIFA Confederation Cup, Under-20 and Under-17 tournaments.

Members also noted that the joint transmission of the English Premier League ends in May 2010 and expressed the desire to bid for terrestrial right for the 2010 2013 Premier League.

They asked that Nigeria as a territory be carved out for the acquisition of the broadcast rights of future Africa Cup of Nations while also resolving to pay for broadcast right of the 2010 New Delhi Commonwealth Games for the interest of Nigeria.

BON encouraged member stations to develop individual policy and advises against acceptance of advertisement from unregistered agencies and ensure that all adverts carry APCON certificates in order to reduce debts owed the industry.

BON also commended the success of the African Media Leadership Forum and its admission into the fold.

AMARC Africa Calls on African Govts to License Community Media

A meeting of the African Board of the World Association of Community Radio (AMARC) and community radio representatives from eleven countries of Western, Eastern, and Southern Africa have called on African governments to work towards the licensing of community broadcasting in their countries.

The AMARC Africa Network met in Accra, Ghana, from December 16 to 18 to improve knowledge sharing on best practices in order to develop integrated sustainability models for Country Community Radio Networks and to increase the social impact of community radio on development.

The workshop, hosted by the Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN), was part of the strategic action plan defined by AMARC Africa members at its 4th Pan African Conference held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire in April 2009.

The workshop permitted participants to share knowledge on the specific challenges of national networks, on the diversity of national contexts, on their forces and weaknesses and to define key areas for action by AMARC Africa as they are key components of the African community radio network. The recommendations of the workshop come to reinforce the reconstruction of AMARC Africa and its action plan including the preparation for the AMARC10 global Conference of Community Radio Broadcasters to be held in Argentina from



Nigeria's representatives at the AMARC Africa Conference November 8 to 13, 2010.

The participants met with community radio stakeholders and Ghana authorities, giving them a better insight of the work accomplished by the GCRN, following the 10th anniversary of Radio Ada, the first Ghana community radio. They also expressed their solidarity for the challenges ahead to the expansion of the community radio sector.

The participants issued the Accra declaration calling governments of Africa to work towards the licensing of community broadcasting in their countries. The AMARC Africa Board and the delegates expressed their concern for the lack of Independent Community Radio in the largest democracy in Africa, Nigeria.

They called upon the government to recognize the basic human rights to freedom of expression and to fulfill the promise to establish community radios in Nigeria.

Fast-track Approval of National Communication Policy

Participants at a workshop have called on the Federal government to fast-track the approval and implementation of the National Communication and community radio policies; review laws that impinge on freedom of expression, media pluralism, and the right to communicate; and ensure that communication policies are reviewed every five years.

Over 50 participants comprising experts and stakeholders in the media and communication sector and drawn from Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), regulators, broadcast operators, the academia, and development communities and partners met at the three-day workshop, November 17 to 20, in Jos, Plateau State to update critical stakeholders to understand the gap areas and make meaningful contributions to finalise the National Communication Policy; review the policy to incorporate and update gap areas; review the draft community radio policy; and make recommendations to the federal government.

In her opening remarks, the Minister of Information and Communication, Prof. Mrs. Dora Akunyili emphasized the need for review of the National Communication policy, she said: "Undoubtedly, we require a National Communication Policy that is broad enough to play its role as a catalyst in national development. The existing policy document released over 20 years ago cannot adequately address the tremendous changes that have taken place in information technology and information management."

She added that the review of both the National communication and community radio policies 'is paramount to the success of



Prof. Mrs. Dora Akunyili, Minister of Information and Communication

not only the vision 20:2020 but also to Nigeria's communication sector."

The Minister who was represented by Mr. Afolabi Adesanya, the Managing Director of Nigerian Film Corporation, said community radio will sufficiently empower communities to participate in processes that affect their lives. She promised that government would provide a conducive regulatory environment for the operation of community radio.

In its goodwill message, the National Orientation Agency said it supported community radio because it is a tool for reaching all sectors of the country, including the grassroots.

In their deliberations, participants observed, among other things, that communication in every sector drives development through the promotion of

national dialogue and integration and serves as catalyst for socio-economic development at all levels; that community radio builds grassroots development by mobilizing all in the community to engage in their own development; that there is a disconnect between communication policies and government's development projects, programmes and initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Vision 20:2020; and that the process of designing appropriate, all-inclusive policies in the communication sector had dragged for too long.

They said they were however, gratified that the Federal Government has reactivated the process and expressed the hope that it would be speedily brought to a successful conclusion so as to engender socio-economic growth and sustainable development.

In the light of their observations, participants also recommended that the media should forge strategic alliances with civil society groups to amplify their voices in support of vibrant communication policies that put the development of every sector at the epicenter of communication strategy.

They also encouraged development partners to continue to support alternative processes aimed at designing, implementing, and monitoring vibrant communication processes and initiatives that support development.

The first National communication Policy was drafted in 1987. An attempt was made to review it in 2004 without success and has become anachronistic with the developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) while there is no community radio policy in Nigeria.

The workshop was organized by the Ministry of Information and communication in collaboration with the United Nations Children Education Fund

Court Halts Alleged Govt's Plan to Cancel DAAR Network Licences

An Abuja Federal High Court presided over by Justice Adamu Bello, on December 21, barred the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) from revoking the network licences issued to DAAR communications Plc in 1995. He said the Commission should suspend all actions seeking the revocation of the existing licence pending the determination and hearing of the motion on notice and directed the NBC, the Federal Ministry of Information and communications and the Attorney-General of the Federation to maintain the *status quo ante*.

Fearing the possible withdrawal of its the network licence DAAR Communications Plc, owners of Ray Power 100.5 FM radio station and Africa Independent Television (AIT) in December 2009 dragged the government of Nigeria to the Court asking it to stop government's plans to cancel its network licence which was

awarded to it. Joined as co-defendants in the suit were the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), Ministry of Information and Communications, and the Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice.

On September 3, 2009, Mr. Yomi Bolarinwa, the Director-General of the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), announced government's decision to break the national network monopolies of the federal government-owned Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) and the Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) and to license one private national network each for radio and television.

The release containing the directive was however, silent on the status of existing network already being enjoyed by DAAR Communications through its radio and television stations.

DAAR claimed it protested the

directive of the NBC to the Ministry of Information and Communications, which advised it to obtain the application form first before forwarding a formal complaint to it.

Based on the advice, DAAR Communications said it purchased the forms for N2m for radio and television network service and filed its complaints to the communication ministry.

DAAR, in an originating summons filed by its counsel, Chief Mike Ozekhome, asked the court to issue a separate order setting aside a purported bid for a fresh network licence held by the National Broadcasting Commission between September 6 and December 12, 2009 on the grounds that it was flawed, overreaching, wrongful, oppressive, unconscionable, null and void.

Justice Adamu Bello granted DAAR Communications its prayers asking all the parties to maintain the *status quo ante*.

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