

THE USE OF RADIO BROADCASTING SYSTEMS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ETHIOPIA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Radio is found to be the most preferred mass medium to support sustainable development efforts in Ethiopia simply because the majority of its citizens are farmers while the country's level of illiteracy is significantly high (57.3%, Central Statistic Authority [CSA, 2010]). The main purpose of this study is to investigate the prospects and challenges in the use of radio for development in Ethiopia. To serve this purpose secondary analysis was employed.

The analysis and interpretation of data reveal that ownership of radio receivers in Ethiopia is notably very low. The other major finding of the study discloses that using radio broadcast mainly as a tool of propaganda rather than as a tool of development is one of the impediments and threatening aspects of the growth of broadcast system in the country. According to the present study the state owned radio broadcasters, both federal and regional, have employed the *Open Broadcasting Strategy*, which follows "a shot-in-the-dark approach" to radio programming. Though it is a very recent phenomenon, regardless of the problems it has encountered, the expansion of community radio system in Ethiopia is very encouraging.

Keywords: Radio, Sustainable Development, State Radio, Community Radio, Propaganda

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

From the total population of Ethiopia (73.75 million), 83.91 percent of the people live in rural areas mainly based on subsistence farming for their livelihood (Central Statistical Authority [CSA], 2010) and the infrastructure is significantly very poor. Farmers' agricultural productivity is often low, which in turn obliges the preponderance farmers to lead a poverty-stricken life. It is evident that poverty is the main challenge not only for the ruralists but also among the urban dwellers though relatively the problem is much severe in the rural areas of the country. "It is confirmed that there is a severe poverty in the urban areas of the country. However, rural areas are places of too grave poverty" (Ministry of Information, 2001).

Sustainable development has ever been taken as the most excellent solution for the major problems of Third World countries, like Ethiopia, including poverty and poverty related problems such as backwardness, hunger, diseases, injustice and exploitation (Hartmann, Patil & Dighe, 1989). On the other hand, sustainable development cannot be achieved only by transferring capital and technology, which is a basic requirement for economic and social development. It strictly necessitates "the communication of ideas, knowledge and skills to make possible the successful adoption of innovations" (Melkote and Steeves, 2008).

Thus, as transfer of capital and technology is not possible without communication, communication that is significant for behavioral and attitudinal change is not possible without adequate information. As it is commonly said by communication scholars, "*Information is knowledge and knowledge is power*". Owing to this, the use of mass media is a prerequisite for communication and attitudinal change which are very crucial in the struggle for sustainable development. Coronel (2011, 6) asserts that "addressing poverty requires not just a transfer of economic resources to the needy but also making information available to the poor so that they can participate more meaningfully in political and social life".

Statement of the Problem

The attainment of sustainable development goals is very dubious without ample opportunity not only to disseminate information to various parts of the society but also to communicate with them effectively. Because, in Ethiopia, development activities, for instance health, agriculture and education, are mainly executed by the government, development information is expected to come from and being communicated via systematic channels, i.e. through development experts, journalists/mass media, etc.

In relation to the mass media landscape of Ethiopia, there is a very high expectation for radio to play the central role in the dissemination of development information, among urban and rural dwellers simply because, compare to other mass media (television, newspaper or internet), "Radio is much more pervasive, accessible and affordable" (Servaes, 2008).

But, in the context of Ethiopia, there are some basic problems which can deter the effective and efficient use of radio for sustainable development. *First*, though radio receivers are expected to be cheap (McLeish, 1996; Fraser and Estrada, 2001; Servaes, *ibid.*) and the main means to access development information, "more than two-third of the rural households are not active listeners" in Ethiopia (Jemal, 2011, 70) simply because they do not have radio receivers at their home. Due to this, such media scenario will likely create a huge disparity between the rural people and the urban elite. White (2008: 11) argues: "There

is a huge communication gap between the modernized elite sector and the vast majority who live in peasant farming, the informal economy or on the verge of survival.” *The dearth of radio receiver is, therefore, one of the major impediments in the use of radio broadcast for sustainable development in Ethiopia.*

Second, owing to various reasons, *the development of mass media in the country is found to be at its infancy stage.* Though there were around 9 radio broadcasts in the country that are owned by the federal and regional states until November 2010, except Radio Ethiopia, all radio systems have been established from 2005 onwards.

Third, the average reception coverage (radius) for most of the regional state radio broadcasters is a little more than 94 km (Ward, 2011), indicating that most of their respective towns and rural areas are yet out of their reach. This unquestionably becomes a reason for the exclusion of especially the ruralists who are usually the majority and deserve to be served.

Fourth, *employing radio for social development purpose in Ethiopia is directly related to the number of languages spoken and ethnic groups lived in the country* since it is a home to more than 80 ethnic groups that vary in population size and speak over 80 different languages (CSA, *ibid.*). As it is unrealistic to establish nationwide radio programming, it is also a big challenge for radio stations that are established in regional states to serve as a means of development while they exclude some of the ethnic languages from being a means to communicate their respective ethnic groups.

To use mass media, especially radio effectively and efficiently so that to make development information accessible to the majority of Ethiopian and then alleviate the grave poverty, it is unavoidable task to sort out most of the impediments including those which are mentioned above.

Objectives of the Study

This study set its main objective to investigate the major prospects and challenges in the use of radio broadcast for development in Ethiopia. With this in view, the study will proceed to explore the major challenges in the use of mass media, especially radio and the unique opportunities to employ radio as one of a means of development, by considering the following specific objectives:

1. To identify the major impediments in the use of radio for development within the Ethiopian mass media landscape.
2. To find out possible solutions for the major impediments that hinders the effective and efficient use of radio broadcast system for sustainable development.
3. To examine the unique opportunities that are available within the radio landscape of Ethiopia so that to employ the broadcast system as a means of development.

Significance of the Study

Mass media that operate in developing countries, particularly those media firms that are owned and run by the states are first and foremost responsible to play a prominent role in the fight against poverty and poverty related problems, such as diseases, backwardness and injustices.

Though belated, the good tidings is that most of the regional states of Ethiopia have established radio broadcast systems since 2005. But, the bad news is that more often than not, the radio stations are not successful in supporting the development

endeavors of the country for various reasons (Jemal, *ibid.*). Thus, the major impediments that hinder the use of the mass media have to be explored so that to pave the way for their effective and efficient use.

Research Questions

As the study explores the prospects and challenges in the use of radio broadcast for sustainable development in Ethiopia, the researcher believes that the following questions have to be addressed to understand the area and gear it to attain the objectives:

1. What are the major impediments in using radio for sustainable development purposes in the context of Ethiopia?
2. How can the major impediments, which hinder the effective and efficient use of radio broadcast system for development in Ethiopia, be sorted out?
3. What are the unique opportunities that are available within the media landscape of Ethiopia so as to employ radio broadcasting system in the fight against poverty?
4. What are the possible ways and strategic means to sort out the dearth of radio receivers in the country particularly among the rural areas so as to boost farmers' radio ownership?

Research Methodology

Secondary analysis, which provides a chance to examine otherwise unavailable data, will be employed. As Wimmer and Dominick (2011, 19) confirms secondary analysis “is a marvelous research approach because it saves time and resources”. Though the research questions raised here demand data that is collected at national level, it is extremely difficult to obtain samples that are sufficiently large and representative for adequate analysis as long as resource is a critical problem. Due to this, the research will be based on secondary data, i.e. “publicly available documentary source material” which “consists of datasets produced by governments, organizations and research teams” (McCulloch, 2004, 75).

The research has made the analysis based on the data that have been mainly collected and compiled by the Ethiopian Central Statistic Authority (1994 Population and Housing Census and 2007 Population and Housing Census), Electoral Reform International Services – ERIS (Ethiopia Media Mapping 2011 and Audience Survey Ethiopia 2011) and Ethiopian Broadcast Authority.

Delimitation

Though there are various problems and some opportunities that are found almost in all the mass media that operate in the country, the scope of this study will be limited to the radio broadcast because it allows for a thorough analysis. Eventually, the research might help to draw some lessons so that to reassess the use of other mass media in light of the findings.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Characteristics of Radio

Radio has its own strengths as well as weaknesses. It is from its strength that its potential emerges. Radio has its own distinct characteristics that never been shared with other mass media, i.e. television and newspaper. As a matter of fact, it is these distinct strengths that make radio a very significant potential medium for sustainable development. It is, therefore, important to look at these characteristics of radio in order to identify its potential that can be used for development purposes.

McLeish (1996) has delineated more than ten characteristics of radio. After making some modifications and rearrangement, and adding one more characteristic (at the end of the list) the researcher has presented them as follows:

- 1) ***The Speed of Radio as Information Disseminator*** - Compared to the other main stream media, radio has an enormous speed. Because radio is a medium of sound, to impart the latest news or any message, it does not need to wait for the printing processes like that of newspaper or to wait for the processes of picture taking and editing like that of television. “Radio speeds up the dissemination of information so that everyone... knows of the news event, the same political idea, declaration or threat” (McLeish, 1996: 3).
- 2) ***Radio Speaks to Millions*** – Newspapers and television stations can also reach millions. To be an audience for a print media, however, a person needs to be literate as he/she needs to be eye sighted to view the television cast or read the news column. Moreover, television broadcasts reach not only those who are living in the urban areas but also can afford to by a television set (Desta Tesfaw, 2007). As long as a preponderance of developing countries, especially Africans reside in rural areas and most of them are illiterate, radio is an invaluable medium that can speak to millions (Coldevin, 2003).
- 3) ***Radio Speaks to the Individual*** – “Unlike television where the viewer is observing something coming out of a box ‘over there’, the sights and sounds of radio are created within us” (McLeish, *ibid.*). Because radio speaks to each of us as an individual audience, it can create greater impact and involvement, which is unlikely to happen in the case of television since this medium “is in general watched by small groups of people and the reaction to a program often affected by the reaction between individuals” (*ibid.*).
- 4) ***Radio Makes Mental Pictures*** – Because television strives to bring about almost every segment of a story with pictures of the event, it does not give a chance for its viewers to use their imagination to draw the picture of the event in their minds. Viewers imagination is closed since the pictures of the story or any program are coming piece by piece through the screen. Television has virtually no room to create mental pictures. Though radio “is a blind medium” (*ibid.*), it has an enormous capability to stimulate listener’s imagination. Radio employs only sounds (or sounds and pause/silence to be precise) and use them with their maximum effect so as to provide the whole pictures of the story.
- 5) ***Radio Has No Boundaries*** – The product of the press (newspapers, magazines, etc.) “Can be stopped at national frontiers but radio is no respecter of territorial limits”. Radio signals go across mountains and oceans with no difficulties (*ibid.*). Thus, for developing countries those are mountainous and have rugged terrains with very poor transportation facilities, like Ethiopia, radio is unsurpassed medium to reach the rural mass.
- 6) ***The Simplicity of Radio*** –Unlike television, neither the camera crew nor video editing is needed. Unlike the newspaper, neither photographing nor page designing and layout are important. As long as radio is totally dependent on sounds, the medium has simplicity in the whole processes of message production – from reporting to broadcast. Moreover, radio production requires very limited technical skills compared to television or print media. As Ms. Grace Githaiga, the Executive Director of EcoNews Africa, puts it “The content of radio programs is also cheap to create and cheap to consume” (cited in Madamombe, 2005: 4).
- 7) ***Radio Is Cheap*** – For a proprietor - the one who envisages to establish a radio station, “Relative to the other media, both its capital cost and its running expenses are small” (McLeish, 4). Radio is also “the prime electronic medium of the poor

because it leaps the barriers of isolation and illiteracy, and it is the most affordable electronic medium to... receive in” (Fraser and Estrada, 2001: 1). Compared to television sets radio receivers are inexpensive and they can be affordable to farmers who are accessed by neither telecast nor newspapers. Its affordability can be taken as a first step for its accessibility. Other things being equal, radio’s cheapness can be one of the main reasons to attract a substantial audience, particularly in the rural areas. “Radio is much more pervasive, accessible and affordable” (Servaes, 2008).

- 8) ***The Personality of Radio*** – Radio is an aural medium. “A great advantages of an aural medium over print lies in the sound of the human voice – the warmth, the compassion, the anger, the pain and the laughter” (McLeish, 7). Radio messages are often delivered by the human voice and due to differences that come from geographical location and social status, different people will definitely have different accents and dialects. It is, therefore, “important that all kinds of voices are heard and not just those of professional broadcasters, power holders and articulate spokesmen” (ibid.).
- 9) ***Radio for Change*** – Radio “acts as a multiplier of change” (ibid. 9). It is a powerful medium to speed up information, to exchange ideas and make discussions. “Through the new knowledge that it introduces within the community, radio can help to change mentalities” (Souleymane and Kadiatou, 2006: 139). However, in order to achieve this goal, according to Souleymane and Kadiatou, some preconditions must be met: “We frequently find that broadcasts reflect the viewpoint of the elite rather than that of the majority. The advantage of the participatory approach lies precisely in its capacity to give everyone a chance to express their expectations and their viewpoint”.

Radio can also contribute a lot to initiate national consensus and encourage the political participation of a society. “It helps to develop agreed objectives and political choice, it enables social and political debate, exposing issues and options for actions” (McLeish, ibid).

- 10) ***Radio is Portable***. A radio receiver can easily suit with people’s frequent mobility such as laborers, farmers and pastoralists. Because it is a portable medium, people can listen to a radio while they are walking on the track-s or working in the fields. Not only this. Who must work continuously at one given time radio does not require the full, undivided attention of its listener as newspapers or television does (Kumbula, 1995: 176; AMARC, 2007).

Though it is not the focus of this research, radio has also some limitations. For example, unlike newspaper radio is an ephemeral medium. As long as the listener is not in time for the news, he will miss it. It is also liable to suffer from interference (McLeish, 5, 8).

Strategies of Radio

McAnany (cited in Moemeka, 1994: 127) has identified five strategies of utilization of radio in rural education and development. These strategies have been employed in developing countries either separately or in combination. Though radio offers excellent potential for development, especially in for the rural settings, as Moemeka stresses it, the level of success or failure of these strategies has been determined by the presence or absence of some preconditions. The preconditions include the creation of conditions to enable the radio to become a *medium of dialogue*, as well as *how the radio is used and for what purposes*.

Open Broadcasting

This is a radio broadcast strategy that its messages are sent to “an unorganized audience”. The basic assumption here is that relevant messages are in a position to be accepted by audience (ibid. 127). By implication, it is understood that the importance and quality of radio news and program items are taken as a determining factors. Some (for instance Gunter and Theroux cited in Moemeka) believed that open broadcast strategy gives opportunity for more people to have access to information and various programs. Talk, features, health, agriculture, family life, childcare are some of the programs which are broadcasted under this strategy.

There are three basic problems that are related to the use of this strategy which directly affect its effectiveness while using radio as a tool for the education of the rural people in community development efforts. The *first* problem is that, “there is no interaction between producers and consumers before programs are planned, produced and broadcast” (ibid. 128). The type of radio programs and their contents are decided, planned, and broadcasted by the experts and journalists who are confined themselves within the studio’s compound. In this case, the broadcast system follows “a *giver-taker pattern*, where radio broadcasters... are virtually taken as not only the sources of information, knowledge and wisdom but also the *givers* while audiences are considered as *takers*” (Jemal 2011: 30-31). “*Second*, these programs are conceived in the studio, with very little or no consultation with specialist agencies and virtually no coordination between them and the communication specialists” (Moemeka, ibid.). As this strategy does not allow audience participation and involvement, it also has not room for the consultation of various stakeholders, i.e. education and development agencies, who are engaged directly in the development endeavors. The *third* problem is related to the unavailability of guidance at the reception end. The *open broadcast strategy* follows “a shot-in-the-dark approach” to radio programming (ibid.).

Instructional Radio

In this strategy a radio medium is employed to bring about social change and development. Instructional radio, unlike the *open broadcast strategy*, targets an organized learning group, “with someone able to supervise and direct as well as elicit feedback”. Tanzania has used this strategy, calling it ‘Radio Study Group’, in order to teach practical skills, civic responsibility, etc. to rural communities. The application of this strategy “requires a structure for organizing listening and learning practices, provision of support materials, presence of monitors or teachers, and some kind of assessment”. Here, there is cooperation between broadcasters and educationalists. The recording of audience reactions can serve as a signpost to guide future programming. Since it demands a relatively high investment, for instance in the area of transport, personnel, etc., the implementation of this strategy, especially on a wide scale is very doubtful. “Tanzania has been able to operate the strategy fairly successfully because... it is a relatively compact country, and... the government places a very high priority on rural community education” (ibid. 128-9).

Rural Radio Forum

It is a strategy “for using radio with discussion and decision for rural groups”. A regular weekly radio programs, often fifteen to thirty-minute, are presented to rural audiences formed into listening groups. The programs often include news stories, answers to listeners’ queries, talks, discussion, etc. The groups listen to the radio broadcast; then, under the guidance of a group leader, make discussions and decisions on the main points that are raised in the radio program.

One of the advantages of the *rural radio forum* is “the follow-up of a radio message with localized discussion and decision ensures positive commitment to agreed-upon decisions and subsequently to social change” (Moemeka, 1994: 130). McAnany argues that, “The combination of a message carried to many groups by a mass like radio, then localized by discussion in small groups and guided to a group decision conforms closely to existing theories of communication and social change” (cited in Moemeka). The second advantage of the forum strategy related to the outcome of the participation. “[M]embership in the group helps to expose the participants to information important to the rural communities, and this turns such individuals into opinion leaders whose views would tend to be respected in the community.” Rural radio can have this type of effect on nonparticipants and it ultimately “leads to changes in attitudes, behaviors, and practices” (Moemeka, 130). Third, forums often send back reports and messages to the radio station. Because of this feedback, which is virtually absent in mass media activities, is ensured. Finally, the localized discussions and decisions “ensure that the people are put in a position in which they can be the subject and object of their own development”.

Rural Radio Forum was started in Canada, and then spread to India and to some countries in Africa and Latin America. “Radio farm forum as an agent for transmission of knowledge has proved to be a success beyond expectation. Increase in knowledge in the forum villages between pre- and post-broadcasts was spectacular, whereas in the non-forum villages it was negligible” (P. Neurath cited in the World Bank, 2007: 33).

Radio Schools

This strategy uses radio for rural community education. Illiterate adults are organized into small listening/learning groups meeting in houses. That is the “schools”. Its basic aim is “to offer fundamental, integral education which goes beyond mere reading, writing, and cognitive skills and tries to change the passive and dependant attitude of people, creating a deepening of their sense of dignity and self-worth, and turning them into ‘new men and women’” (Moemeka, *ibid.*).

Though *radio schools* is the most widespread strategy which has been used in Latin America, its application is often limited to literacy and basic education which in turn “leaves out almost completely the political, social and physical developmental aspects of rural problems” (*ibid.* 131-32).

Radio and Animation

This strategy is also known as *the radio participating group*. It “aims at promoting among local communities a trained cadre of decision leaders.” Under the strategy, radio programs have to play a role in defining, but not suggesting, solutions to the people’s problems. “Programs are made from recorded views and responses about a definite problem presented by some members of the listening public”. After listening to the programs, the participating groups “discuss the problem further... and subsequently eliciting some decision”. Some of the underlying assumptions of the strategy include the following: problem definition and its solution must not be imposed from outside rather they have to come from inside, i.e. from the local community; “The social animator is to be as closely identified with the local community as possible”; feedback from the community is a vital means because community participation and social action is the goal (*ibid.* 133).

One of the weaknesses of the animation strategy springs from the slowness or even inability of many rural communities to organize themselves without any support from outside. The second problem or weakness is related to the manipulation of

people's participation. The people may be given "the opportunity to criticize and complain as a safety valve to forestall rural unrest, while no real policy changes may result from the local participation" (ibid. 134).

As it has been already discussed above, all of the five radio strategies have their own advantages and weaknesses. According to Moemeka there is an ideal strategy, which combines the advantages, qualities and strengths of some of the strategies. The ideal strategy could be used for rural community education and development. Moemeka calls the ideal strategy "*Local Radio Strategy*". With regard to its role, Moemeka argues,

[The local radio strategy] should aim at improving the lot of the rural people in their totality – make them literate, widen their horizons, raise their aspirations realistically, point to their problems, create in them the willingness to find solutions to these problems and imbue them with a sense of dignity and self-worth (ibid. 135-6).

To summarize it, radio is the most efficient and effective as well as appropriate medium for rural settings where the preponderant of the population is illiterate farmers or pastoralists while social development is the principal goal assuming that listeners' real participation and two-way communication are ensured.

THE CURRENT USE OF RADIO IN ETHIOPIA

Up to 2005, as it has been stated previously, there were only three broadcasting stations in media landscape of the country, i.e. Radio Ethiopia, Radio Fana and the Voice of Wayane Tigray. It was after this time that Regional States started to establish local radio stations. According to the report that the researcher obtained from Ethiopian Broadcast Authority, up to December 2015, there were 34 radio stations that were operational in the country. From these nine radio stations are belonged to state media; they are owned either by the Federal Government or Regional States. From the remaining radio stations, nine of them are commercial and 16 are community radios.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

As it has been mentioned earlier, this study is based on secondary data. This part of the study will attempt to analyze and interpret the secondary data, which have been mainly collected and compiled by the Ethiopian Central Statistic Authority (i.e. 1994 and 2007 Population and Housing Censuses), Electoral Reform International Services (ERIS, 2011 and 2012) and Ethiopian Broadcast Authority.

Major Prospects in the Use of Radio Broadcast for Sustainable Development in Ethiopia

The Expansion of Radio Systems in the Country

Even after the fall of the socialist regime, the Ethiopian airwaves were mainly dominated by Radio Ethiopia, Radio Fana and the Voice of Wayane Tigray that are owned by the federal government and two political parties – EPRDF (Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Party) and TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front) – respectively, for almost fourteen years. A pioneering station especially for regional radios, Amhara Radio, was established in May 2005. From 2005 to December 2015, just within one decade, 31 radio stations were established - on average more than three stations per year. This is can be taken as an indication that the expansion of radio broadcasting system in the country is an auspicious.

Though belated, these all can be taken as promising beginning and the likelihood is that the three Regional States, which do not have any broadcasting system in their soils, i.e. Afar, Beneshangul Gumuz and Gambella, will establish local radio stations - by aspiring to use them as a tool of development.

The Availability of a Friendly Legislation to Set Up Community Broadcasting

The absence of appropriate legislation or having not adequately precise criteria that define what is and is not community radio was one of a noteworthy challenge in promoting community radio in Ethiopia some few years ago as it is true in some countries (Gumucio-Dagron, 2008, 44). Though the first ever broadcast proclamation was issued in Ethiopia 1998/9 (No. 178), unfortunately it did not able to show the types of broadcast services, i.e. state/public, commercial and community. As a result, the establishment of community broadcasting services was controversial in Ethiopia. In 2006/7, it was amended by Broadcast Service Proclamation No. 533/1999, which clearly states what community broadcast is and the services that are expected from it (Ayele and Desta, 2009/10).

Due to this, it is the most propitious time to establish community radio in the country simply because the legal environment is favorable and encouraging.

The Expansion of Community Radios

What makes community radio more interesting compare to state/public or commercial radio is that it operates “in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community” (Tabing, 2002, 9). In the arena of community radio, it is the society that moves to the radio, not the other way round as it is very common in the context of other type of radio ownership. It provides a means for local communities, who are often voiceless, to voice their own issues, concerns, cultures, traditions and languages. In short, community radio gives access to voices in the community and encourages diversity, creativity and participation.

Currently, as it is mentioned earlier, there are 16 community radio broadcasters in Ethiopia. 12 more stations are under way. Because community radios are set up to serve the people not that much far off from the station, the geographical landscape of the country will not be that much a problem as long as electric power is available. As it has been mentioned earlier, Radio Ethiopia, which is owned by the Federal Government and the first radio station in the country, broadcasts in eight different local (Amharic, Oromiffa, Tigrigna, Somali, Afar, Harari, Agnawak, Nuer) and three foreign (Arabic, English, and French) languages.

Having transmissions in different languages seems to remain the main challenge for Radio Ethiopia, which is expected to play a prominent role in the processes of national development while Ethiopia is an ethnically diversified country with more than 80 languages (Jemal, 2011). The expansion of community radio is an ideal solution for such problems related to the availability of many languages within a country as long as the stations have to be established and run by the local people and serve the local people.

The expansion of community radio is, therefore, one of the best opportunities to use radio for development purposes at the grassroots level. This will certainly pave the way to design strategies that will help to support development endeavors by using the mass medium in the most effective way given that listener’s real participation and two-way communication are ensured.

Journalism Education

Within a decade (from 2004-2007/8), seven universities (*Bahir Dar University, Mekele University, Addis Ababa University, Wollega University, Gigigia University, Dilla University and Unity University*) have already launched undergraduate programs in journalism, media and communication studies. Addis Ababa University has been also running postgraduate program in the same field of studies for several years, and Bahir Dar University commenced the same program in 2011.

These situations have created a golden opportunity to have more and more professionals in the field of journalism and communication which will contribute for quality production of radio programs that will appeal audiences and fulfill their interests that in turn play a key role to bring about the needed behavior change which is the base for sustainable development.

Major Challenges in the Use of Radio Broadcast for Development in Ethiopia

Dearth of Ownership of Radio Receivers in Ethiopia

Brook (2000: 21) claims that “The total number of radio sets in Ethiopia in 1994 was 10.55 million. The domestic radio audience is estimated to be 40 million, two third of the total population.” In spite of Brook’s claim, the 1994 Population and Housing Census (CSA, 1999) asserts that there were nearly 1.68 million radio receives while the total population of the country was about 53.5 million and number of households were approximately 10.8 million making the domestic radio audience only 15.6 percent of the total population.

As the 2007 Population and Housing Census (CSA, 2010) discloses, there were over 5.6 million radio receivers and less than one million TV sets in Ethiopia while there were a little more than 15.1 million households in the country. Thus, it was only about 37.5 percent of the households that had radio. This means that from every 8 houses of the country, radio was available only in 3 of them. In other words, radio broadcasts were only reaching to 37.4 percent of the total population of Ethiopia.

It is clear to understand from the census results that radio receivers possession in the country has augmented by more than 30 percent within 13 years (from 1994 to 2007). Nonetheless, even in the new millennium, the domestic radio audience in Ethiopia did not yet that much far from one-third of the total population, which has an implication that those who wish to use radio as a means of development need to do their best to sort out the dearth of radio in the country.

On the other hand, despite the dearth of radio receivers in the country, there is a great discrepancy between urban and rural dwellers. It was 68.5 percent of the urban and only 30.1 percent of the rural households that had radio while 84 percent of the population was living in rural Ethiopia (CSA, 2010). It is worth noticing that the number of households who *have radio* (30.1 percent) in the *rural areas* is almost similar with the number of households who *have not radio* (31.5 percent) in the *urban areas*. Due to this, more than two-third of the rural households are not active listeners.

This will likely create a huge disparity between the rural people and the urban elite. White (2008) asserts that “There is a huge communication gap between the modernized elite sector and the vast majority who live in peasant farming, the informal economy or on the verge of survival”. The dearth of radio receiver is, therefore, one of the main impediments to use radio as a tool of communication in order to support development endeavors in Ethiopia.

When it comes to TV sets and telephone communication, the problem becomes more and more crucial. As much of rural areas are virtually deprived from telephone communication and television broadcast, it is only less than one percent of the households are connected with telephone and reached via television signal. According to the 2007 Population and Housing Census, there were less than one million (855,516) TV sets in the country. This means that it was only 5.7 percent of the countries households that had TV sets. From all urban households only 28 percent had television sets and 20 percent telephone lines (CSA, 2010) (Figure 1). White (2008: 11) argues: “If the modernized sector has a wealth of newspapers, magazines and better broadcasting, little of this 'wealth' of information reaches the grassroots.”

A close analysis of the 2007 Census (CSA, *ibid.*) data can also reveal some remarkable findings. It is noteworthy that the Afar Regional State, despite the fact that it “...is one of the most impoverished zones in one of the world’s poorest countries” (Bryden, 1996a), has possessed better numbers of radio receivers than other regional states of the country that are relatively developed. The data disclose that 40 percent of the households of the Afar Regional State had radio receivers while the country’s average was only 37 percent. What is more interesting is that the rural Afar, who are predominantly marginalized pastoralists which lead a ‘nomadic’ life style, had a better possession of radio compared to the country’s average for the rural area where sedentary life style is dominant. Thus, radio receiver was available in nearly 38 percents of the rural households of the Afar Regional State while the country’s average for the same area was only 30.1%. This can be taken as a clear indication that information is highly valued among the Afar society.

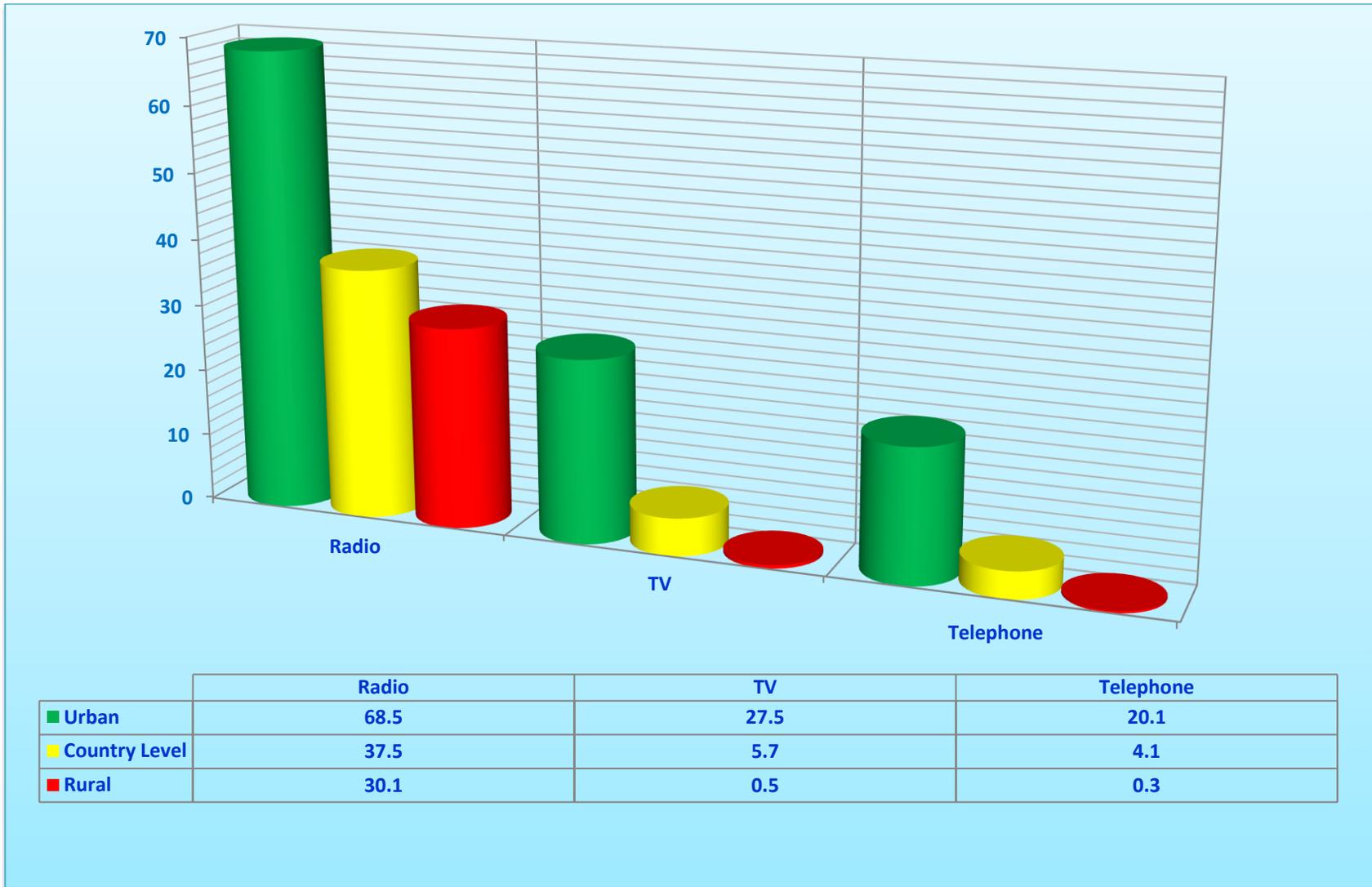


Figure 1: Shows the availability of communication tools in Ethiopia at household level until 2007 (data from CSA, 2010).

According to Ward and Ayalew (2011: 12) "... there remains a significant number of the population that does not use mass media for information purposes in the majority of regional states". Thus, the question is what has to be done to sort-out the dearth of radio receivers in the country? A recent research proposes that "the most appropriate solution to solve the dearth of radio... is selling of radios to pastoralists [farmers] and poor urban families with discount prices while distributing radios for free is also an ideal solution" (Jemal, 2011: 246). According to this research, regional states can be primarily responsible in facilitating the supply of radios for farmers and the urban poor. It is worth mentioning that Jimma University has already taken the initiative by distributing 2000 radio receivers, that also work with solar power and winding up, for its community radio listeners (EBA [Ethiopian Broadcast Authority], 2012).

Lack of Strategy for Radio Broadcasting

Though there are around five strategies of radio that have been utilized for rural development by various developing countries (McAnany cited in Moemeka, 1994), it seems that either of the strategy is employed in Ethiopia. State radios are run without a clearly designed strategy that can be used as guidelines to use broadcasting for development in the most effective and efficient ways. Since both Radio Ethiopia and regional radios have broadcasted for audiences who are unorganized, however, it is possible to imagine that they have followed the *Open Broadcasting Strategy* where the importance and quality of radio news and program items are taken as guarantee to secure millions as listeners. The basic assumption under this strategy is that relevant messages, such as health, agriculture, family life, childcare, are in a position to be accepted by audience (Moemeka, 1994: 127).

But the problem is that the programs in the country's radio stations and Radio Ethiopia's programs in particular are very popular for having low quality (Desta Tesfaw, 2007: 80). Though it has an enormous capability to stimulate listener's imagination, radio "is a blind medium" (McLeish, 2005: 1). Radio employs only sounds and uses them with their maximum effect so as to provide the whole pictures of the story. As long as sound is the only tool that radio has to impart its messages, lack of appeal is quite perilous for radio stations.

As it has been mentioned earlier, there are three basic problems that are related to the use of *Open Broadcasting Strategy* which directly affect its effectiveness, especially when radio is used to educate the mass people who lacks basic knowledge related to agriculture, health, etc. Therefore, it is clear to understand that the state media, especially the radio broadcasting systems, which are highly expected to be a tool of development, are encircled with three basic problems;

- a. In most of the state radios, programs are planned, produced and broadcast without any interaction between producers and listeners (Moemeka, 1994: 128). Due to this, the broadcasting systems follow a *giver-taker pattern* (Jemal, 2011), where radio broadcasters are considered as the most knowledgeable persons who know what is good and not for listeners.
- b. Programs are also conceived with little or no consultation with various governmental organizations. Virtually, there is no coordination between the concerned Ministries/Bureaus and the journalists and/or radio managers.

- c. Both the federal (Radio Ethiopia) and regional radio stations mainly follow “a shot-in-the-dark approach” to radio programming as long as there is no guidance at the reception end.

Skilled Manpower vs. Practical Knowledge

Desta Tesfaw (2007: 80), then General Manager of the Ethiopian Broadcast Agency, lists around eight points as the basic impediments of the broadcast media in the country. One of these problems is “...shortage of skilled and knowledgeable journalists within the broadcast sector.” To the contrary, based on the data gathered from broadcasters that are licensed and registered with EBA, Ward (2011: 13) contends: “The workforce is... well educated and a high percentage of broadcast journalists have successfully completed tertiary education... a similar high percentage of these have attended journalism or mass communication courses or courses in the arts or humanities”.

At least in the last decade, as it has been discussed earlier, journalism and mass communication has been given as a field of study in various universities of the country. This effort unquestionably alters the availability of mass media professionals in the market. Owing to this, “shortage of skilled and knowledgeable journalists within the broadcast sector” may not be that much a problem. But it is evident that most of the broadcast journalists lack practical experience as long as much of the journalistic education they have earned focuses on theoretical knowledge.

Development vs. Propaganda

As it has been already mentioned, up to December 2015 there were nine radio stations that are owned either by the Federal Government or Regional States. Except Radio Ethiopia, which is run by the federal government, the rest are owned by the regional states. All these broadcasting systems are publicly funded broadcasters (Ward, 2011). Owing to this, they are highly expected to play a central role in the social development of the country – Ethiopia. Thus, the stations are anticipated to function not only to disseminate information but also to provide a forum so that the public can have an ample chance to discuss, challenge and debate government policies and strategies (Wanyeki, 2000: 4).

Radio Ethiopia, as it is the first broadcasting station in the country, is the first mass medium to inform and educate Ethiopian as a mass audience by using radio signals. It is this station that has been informing the masses about the happenings in their surroundings, within their country and around the world for more than seven decades. It cannot be denied that it is this station which has been extensively educating townfolk and ruralists about various development issues (health, education, agriculture, etc.) for more than half a century. It is this station which promotes various cultural heritages of the Ethiopian nations and nationalities. These all are the most important and invaluable roles it has played in the development processes of Ethiopia, which is one of the poorest countries in the world.

When one weighs the roles played by this radio in order to enhance development of the country against its gigantic capacity, however, it becomes clear that the lion’s share of the airtime has been used for governments’ propaganda. In short, Radio Ethiopia in its long journey has served its creators (i.e. the existing and the then potentate governments) a lot than the majority of the people.

For instance, at the time of the Emperor (1930-1974) it had been mainly used to promote the good images of the king and the elites around him. Radio broadcast had served the Emperor as a means for controlling and manipulating the

masses. The socialist government, for its part, had employed the radio for Marxist and Leninist propaganda and for agitation to the civil war (Brook, 2000).

Now in the new millennium, Radio Ethiopia is still the monopoly of the existing ruling party in power. Plural voices are hardly heard as long as “Radio... broadcasting ... remained almost entirely the preserve of the federal and regional states” (ibid.). Moreover, experience shows that the station has more music and more propaganda, rather than promoting development activities. When it tries to promote development programs, it presents in a dull and monotonous way.

Since Radio Ethiopia has been broadcasting for more than half a century, it has still enjoyed widespread popularity within the majority of listeners nationwide (Ward and Ayalew, 2011: 26). Until the advent of Radio Fana, because the station was the only broadcaster and education in the field of journalism is a very recent phenomenon in the country, it is not that much questionable for Radio Ethiopia to be the only ‘model’ for public service broadcasting in the country. Due to this, the other side of the coin is that apart from their establishment in various parts of the country, there is no guarantee whether the newly established broadcast systems in the regional states will air plural voices. There is no guarantee that the total monopolization of the Regional States or City Administrations will not happen though it seems too early to judge now (Jemal, 2011). In short, there is no assurance whether they may not follow the footsteps of Radio Ethiopia, which is a favorite radio station nationwide (ibid. 24) - the only model for ‘public service broadcasting’ in the country.

This, i.e. using radio broadcast as a tool of propaganda rather than as a tool of development, is one of the impediments or threatening aspects of the growth of broadcast system in the country. Birhanu Olana (2009: 4) encapsulates the use of mass media in Ethiopia: “The history of mass media in Ethiopia exhibited that the role of journalism has been greatly shaped by the needs and interests of the government in power, which used the mass media to impose its ideological orientation”.

Regional States without Radio Systems

With the last 11 years, most of the country’s Regional States have already set up their own broadcast systems, which can be considered as a general development in the regional states political arena. But still there are around three regional states that do not yet establish their own radio systems, i.e. Afar, Beneshangul Gumuz and Gambella. The regional states, which are lagging behind, have four things in common: they are homes for pastoralists and found in the marginal border areas; they are the most backward and the lowland areas of the country (Jemal, 2011).

Reception Quality

Though Radio Ethiopia’s current transmission covers 86% of the country (Radio Ethiopia and Television Agency - ERTA), to fairly large areas of the country the signal reaches through SW (short wave), a frequency which is not in a position to secure reception quality and at list to some extent entails a challenge especially to unlettered people to tune to the particular station.

Especially those regional states that do not have a radio station at their soil (Afar, Beneshangul Gumuz and Gambella) are accessed through SW. The problem is not only the absence of any single radio station that operates in these regional

states but also the non-existent of relay system to receive and retransmit their radio signals in the regions that can ensure the reception quality (EBA 2012; Jemal, 2011).

When it comes to regional broadcasters, Dehub FM covers all parts of the region by its network stations set up in seven various places within the region. The average reception coverage (radius) for the rest of regional state radio broadcasters is a little more than 94 km (Ward, 2011: 37), indicating that most of their respective towns and rural areas are yet out of their reach. Therefore, they need to do some expansion works, i.e. setting up network stations in other parts of the regional states, so that to reach the rural people, who are the majority and deserve to be served, i.e. informed and educated.

Community Radio Broadcasters

Currently, there are 16 community radio broadcasters in Ethiopia. Kore Community Radio is the first broadcaster, set up in 2006. There are at least four basic problems related the use of community radio for development in the country:

First, the number of community radio broadcasters is significantly very low to serve the townspeople let alone the rural people who are the preponderant citizens of the country;

Second, because community radio was started to be established tardily, the experience and knowledge in managing and running its programs is insufficient. According to Desta Tesfaw (2007: 80) “lack of awareness on community broadcasting within the country” is the main reason for community radio’s being belatedly established.

Third, since Ethiopia is an ethnically diversified country with more than 80 languages, to set up community radio for all most each language speaker or ethnic group demands a huge investment.

Four, there are some signs of interruption and closure of the broadcasting systems due to financial problems and technical breakdown. For instance, Harar Community Radio 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 (2009) due to technical breakdown and it is currently not on the on-air (Jemal, 2015).

One-Step Flow of Mass Communication Model vs. Two-Way Communication

Though it seems unlikely to claim that radio, which is often owned by a state and has based its broadcast on one-step flow of mass communication model, has played an enormous role in assisting the social development of poor countries, radio has still enjoyed widespread popularity within especially the elites of the Third World countries (Jemal, 2011). Political elites still have a strong believe that radio can play an enormous role to bring about social development. As Castello and Braun (2006: 18) posit “The ‘traditional’ linear, top-down model [one-step flow of mass communication model] for communication is still very much in the heads of the actors and guides their behavior, even though there is little or no evidence of the success of this approach”. Despite the fact that the ‘passing of the dominant paradigm’ (Mefalopulos, 2008: 66) was declared several decades ago, the theory has a profound influence within the developing

countries, especially on the parts of political and intellectual elite. Kumar (1994: 88) asserts, “The dominant paradigm of modernization never *really* passed!”

The use of this model to assist development efforts in developing countries will unlikely to be successful since there are deeply-rooted superstitious beliefs and attitudes which will unlikely be penetrated by messages that are just sent from the mass media (Jemal, 2011). “Messages transmitted over the mass media are *alone* unlikely to effect substantial changes in strongly held attitudes or overt behavior” (Rogers, 1973).

It is not arguable that the two dominant broadcast media in Ethiopia, i.e. Radio Ethiopia and Ethiopian Television (ETV), adhere to the dominant paradigm, which follow the one-step flow of mass communication model that is mainly dictated by one-way communication as long as audience participation and feedback is very limited and they are elite centered.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the major findings of the study, the following main conclusions and recommendations were drawn.

1. As long as the ownership of radio receivers in Ethiopia is significantly very low, the dearth of radio receiver is one of the impediments to use radio broadcast for development purposes in Ethiopia.
2. In order to employ radio as an effective means to support social development, the expansion of radio system in the country is not enough, however. It is unavoidable task to resolve the critical problem related to the dearth of radio receivers in the country.
 - Thus, it is recommended that the Federal Government and the Regional States as well as NGOs that are working in the country have to take the responsibility in order to sort out the dearth of radio receivers in Ethiopia, which is the major barrier to development information and news to reach the majority of farmers and pastoralists.
 - This can be done either by selling of radios to farmers, pastoralists and poor urban families with discount prices or distributing it for free, or both. As long as it is evident that even those who have radio may not listen to programs because they do not afford batteries (Jemal, 2011), it would be a good idea to supply radios that also work with solar power and winding up.
3. A use of radio broadcasting is unlikely to be successful in informing, educating and persuading farmers, pastoralists and the public in general related to development issues as long as the broadcaster in Ethiopia has employed an *Open Broadcasting Strategy*. This is because, owing to various reasons (lack of experience in producing quality radio programs, the adherence to one-step flow of mass communication model, the interference of government bodies, etc.), it is difficult to take the importance and quality of radio news and programs as guarantee to secure listenership from millions of Ethiopians.
 - It is, therefore, recommended that it is unavoidable task for state radio broadcasters in Ethiopia, both regional and federal, to design *Local Radio Strategy*, which aims:
 - ...at improving the lot of the rural people in their totality – make them literate, widen their horizons, raise their aspirations realistically, point to their problems, create in them the willingness to find

solutions to these problems and imbue them with a sense of dignity and self-worth (Moemeka, 1994: 135-6).

4. Lack of practical knowledge in the field of radio journalism is also the other challenge to use radio broadcast effectively to support development endeavors in Ethiopia.
 - It is an inescapable task for radio broadcasting systems that are established to educate and persuade the mass people to give on the job-training that mainly focuses on practice for their radio journalists.
5. The study also indicates that using radio broadcast mainly as a tool of propaganda rather than as a tool of development, is one of the impediments or threatening aspects of the growth of broadcast system in Ethiopia. This will definitely become a hindrance to use radio effectively in order to fight against poverty.
 - Owing to this, it is recommended that the newly established broadcast systems in the regional states have to air plural voices and encourage the real (not pseudo) participation of their society so as to be a tool for the fight against poverty and poverty related problems such as diseases, corruption and injustice.
 - Moreover, it is also highly recommended that the three regional states - Afar, Beneshangul Gumuz and Gambella - have to set up their own radio stations so that to use radio as one of the means of development by informing, educating and persuading pastoralists who are most vulnerable for poverty and poverty related problems.
6. It is unlikely for newly established regional state radios to serve the majority of their people while their average reception coverage (radius) is only a little more than 94 km.
 - To use radio broadcast for development purposes, they need to set up network stations so as to reach the marginalized section of the society especially farmers and pastoralists.
7. Though it is a very recent phenomenon, the expansion of community radio in Ethiopia is very encouraging regardless of the problems it has encountered.
 - Thus, it is crucially important that the Ethiopian government, the civic society and various NGOs have to support the establishment of more and more community radios and assist the already established stations by providing trainings and financial assistance so that to sort out their problems which are mainly related to media management and production training and technical breakdown.
 - This study has also recommended that community radio is the best mass medium to support development efforts for several reasons; such as undue interference of the government is virtually none since the community itself is the proprietor of the station, the medium often employs a two-way communication model as long as the interaction is often between coequals, members of the community are the only agenda setters, etc. (Jemal, 2015).
8. Radio broadcasting can play an outstanding role in the fight against much of poverty and poverty related problems in developing countries, such as Ethiopia, only when two-way communication model is employed.
 - It is logical to recommend that regional stations should not follow the footsteps of Radio Ethiopia. Regional state radios have to employ a two-communication model so that they can be in a better position to play a prominent role in the processes of social development for their respective community.

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