# Radio Pluralism and Manpower Needs

## by Kwame Karikari*

## Abstract

This paper states that the "democracy movement" in Africa has reasserted the need for independent press activity. There has emerged independent radio broadcasting, which supports the abrogation of state monopoly of the broadcast media. It is up to the media educators and communicators to ensure that the main objective of the emerging media ought to be the improvement of the people's lifestyle, both materially and politically.

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# Radio Pluralisme et des Besoins de la Main d'Oeuvre

## par Kwame Karikari

Cet article souligne le fait que le "mouvement de démocratie" en Afrique a contribué à imposer la nécessité d'une presse indépendante pour ses activités. Des média indépendants naissants et qui luttent pour l'abrogation du monopole de l'Etat dans les média ont vu le jour. Il appartient aux éducateurs et aux communicateurs du monde des média à s'assurer que l'objectif principal de cette naissante industrie des média se concentre sur l'amélioration des conditions de vie des peuples, que ce soit sur le plan matériel ou politique.

# Introduction

The so-called "democracy movement" in Africa is yet to prove it will bring about fundamental reforms in the political and economic organization of African societies. However, already a prominent feature of the movement is the reassertion of independent press activity. But the more significant historic development is the emergence of independent radio broadcasting - the abrogation of state monopoly of the radio/TV broadcast media in several countries.

Either such radio stations have already been legislation or constitutional provisions which now permit the operation of independent electronic media as in Ghana, Nigeria and elsewhere.

The implications of this development could be far-reaching as far as the development of free expression, or the manifestation of pluralism of ideas in public affairs, is concerned. How far the emerging independent broadcasting will enhance the advancement and improvement of the material and political conditions of life for the people, could at this moment be conjectural. Though, precisely because of that uncertainty, it is incumbent on media educators an communicators generally to influence the orientation of the emerging industry towards objectives to support such aspirations.

## Pluralism Defined

The striving of ideological and political pluralism could only complement such an orientation. After all, pluralism is nothing else but the free expression of social and political reality. That is, pluralism is not a simple question of numbers. It demands that variety, difference, contrariety, divergence are permitted, tolerated and even encouraged. Society itself is characterized as such, both in its natural and social expressions.

Applied to the mass media, it demands the existence of publications, radio or TV stations free to express and exhibit the ideological expression of this: in politics, in religious beliefs, in economic policy perspectives, in cultural diversity such as the use of any language and respect of differences in practices.

But when we crave for pluralism in Radio broadcasting, it may not be enough to satisfied with the existence of stations manifesting the attributes of pluralism. In any case, much as we may wish it, the outcome will be dictated by the reality of who has the wherewithal in invest. This is where the real test of how truly plural the mass media will be, comes up.

Who will wield the social and economic power to invest? Would not

"pluralism", be circumscribed by cash flow? That is, will pluralism not be a preserve of the elite? Indeed, may it not be dominated or extremely influenced by foreign interests? Corporate bodies of a non-economic character, such as political parties, religious organizations and trade unions may be able to invest in broadcasting stations. Would the peasantry - the majority unorganized mass of the poor in our rural areas - be part of this development? Would the rural areas be covered? Who would pay for that?

Regardless of the geographical location and coverage of radio broadcasting, would content be pluralistic enough to respond to the needs of lower social classes? Or would they be devoted to the interests of the elite, while only incidentally providing doses of "development" messages underived from the total social experiences of these social groups?

Several questions could be posed regarding the content of pluralism in relation to the development of the independent mass media. The answers are likely to be sought on the terrain's of legislation, the local communities, and in meetings and conferences of communicators and communication educators. Time itself will be a terrain for the evolution of the direction of such a development. Though, this cannot be left to "fate" or "faith" since, indeed it will not be left to "fate" by those who have the wherewithal to invest and broadcast.

## Challenges

There are, in the interim, a number of questions which require urgent addressing, whichever direction the trend takes andwhoever owns what. Though how best and how fast they are addressed would depend on the availability of financial resources to respond to these exigencies:

1.  The first is finance to acquire the basic capital and infrastructural facilities and equipment: transmitters, premises, studio equipment, inputs, salaries and other running costs. It is true that the increasing simplification of electronic equipment, particularly, broadcast equipment, is also reducing the costs of the facilities. But his is extremely relative, as far as African economies are concerned.
2.  Secondly, the rapidly changing developments in electronic technology, pose problems for the new development in mass media organizations.

It is also the case, for broadcast technology, as the UNIDO observed in 1988, that, "Perhaps the most significant feature of the current

scene on the application of industrial technology for development is that almost the whole spectrum of applied industrial technology that we see around us in Africa and in the developed countries is transferred from the developed countries with the developing countries being the unequal partners in this exchange."

That this is one of the most rapidly advancing fields of science and technology, indicates that, the enormity of the challenge for human resource development to meet the requirements thereof, would seem daunting indeed.

But we would like to dwell more on the challenges for human resource needs to meet the requirements for programme development, production and presentation, and management of the broadcasting establishments emerging. This is not in any way to downgrade the problem and central place of technical competence and inefficiency.

We take up the challenge for programmes and management personnel, first, also because of shortage of, or non-existence of an already-made population of broadcasters. Further, because the character and impact broadcasting will make on the societies will to a greater extent, depend on the content of what is broadcast.

Pluralism, democracy, demand that we resist any attempt to legislate or enforce broadcasting structures and stations along a uniform model. It would be preferable for legislation to encourage development-oriented broadcasting stations, by way of incentives and not penalties, censorship or prescribed models.

However, the danger is that it is both cheaper economically and ideologically attractive - for the urban elites and youths - to replicate the brainless American music-all-day FM stations here; a tradition which, in my opinion, would defeat the desirable objectives of broadcasting in Africa today.

## Training

Would the programme personnel needs be met, even in the medium term? As has been shown in several African countries today, with regard to the print media, the existing state media have a monopoly of journalists or broadcasters. For some time to come and for many projected stations, the situation is not likely to change, for the simple reason that many new stations - like the independent press in most countries - many not be able to attract broadcasters by emoluments. Inability to attract better trained and qualified personnel would have an important implication for advertising revenue. Politically, the dangers of untrained, unprofessional broadcasters falling into traps of libel, or broadcasting messages likely to create social or political

difficulties, may not be far-fetched. Either development could attract the venom of the worst instincts of legislators in already tenuous democratic regimes.

## So how must we address the problem of personnel development?

### 1. Training Institutions

The World Communication Report, UNRSCO, 1989, (p. 119) contains a list of centres which organize or coordinate training courses for professionals in mass media, for short-term training at port-experience or advanced level, excluding long-term academic courses for degrees or diplomas. Of the 11 institutions ostensibly set up for regional training programmes for mass media personnel, therefore, only two in Africa: the Ouagadougou Inter-African Rural Radio Studies Centre set up by URTNA specializes in radio. Even then, it has principally trained personnel from francophone countries in its 2-year programmes; and the Kenya Institute of Mass Communication which is listed as offering also 2-year diploma programmes in broadcasting and television and film for a year.

It is to be acknowledged that nearly all the 35 journalism and communication training institutions surveyed by Nordenstreng/Boafo (1988) in Sub-Saharan Africa, taught some level or other of Broadcasting.

### 2. Facilities in broadcasting stations

Training units of such stations are oriented to their own national needs and further face limitations of staff and facilities.

### 3. What the schools can do
- short-term courses for stations.
- Broadcasters Association to seek training collectively by aiding schools.
- Intensification, review of broadcasting courses.

## Conclusion

The next biennial meeting of the ACCE must take up this matter. The School of Communication Studies has already made a proposal to this effect.