Radio as a Tool for National Development

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Author's contribution

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Review Article

ABSTRACT

The significant role radio plays in the development of any nation can never be overemphasized, most especially community radio. The general opinion about community radio is favorable; it has been identified as a powerful medium capable of promoting rapid change among various communities across the globe. Community radio is a cost-effective, non-formal learning medium, which can be used to reach many hitherto unreached and uneducated across vast geographic distances, communities in the most remote and isolated regions. CR has also been identified as vital in the delivery of vital developmental information to all members of the community irrespective of age, gender, or beliefs. Uninformed individuals are subjected to the tyranny of those who are informed because, without a voice, they cannot participate in the management of their land, their region, and their country, until they can understand precisely what the issues are and how they could contribute their quota to the attainment of the set goals in their environment. The transition of the "voiceless" to alert and active communities, most especially as one-health informed persons begins with community enlightenment of the benefits of both sustainable development goals and the one health policy. Community radio is identified in this work as vital to disseminating information on health and SDGs education, most especially in African communities where oral customs and indigenous languages are still distinct signatures. The work will examine the importance of community radio which its credo is information and education and the valuable contribution it can give to the attainment of sustainable development goals and its vital place in the promotion of animal-human health in African hard-to-reach communities. It will also serve as a proposal to the government on the need to implement community radio considering its impacts on the health and wellbeing of rural people in other African countries where it is in use.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Radio is a technology with low production costs, with low infrastructure costs, and with marginal costs of distribution close to zero [1]. As an aural medium, it does not exclude those who are unable to read or write and it is ideally suited to conveying content in vernacular languages. For these reasons, it is perhaps unsurprising that radio has become an intimate and pervasive presence throughout the developed world and, at the same time, has penetrated the remotest areas of the poorest countries [2]. Radio, as a sector, can be broken down into several sub-sectors such as community, national or public, commercial, and international. Community radio refers to radio stations that are situated within the community, which serve the community, and are staffed by a broad cross-section of community members. Such stations tend to have a strong commitment to local participation, social inclusion, and social or community development; [3]. Public radio refers to radio that serves the public interest and which may bestate-owned and run, or state-funded and independent (i.e. the BBC model). Within this sector broadcasting at both national and local levels occurs, with local public broadcasting charged with reflecting issues of local relevance. Many state-run and/or controlled public radio networks in the South are overtly propagandist and are socially exclusive, rather than inclusive, i.e. they may actively favor certain discrete ethnic, religious, political, or language groups. Commercial radio at the national and local levels tends to have little or no public service commitment and stations are generally run for profit, carry advertising, and often broadcast substantial amounts of popular music. Though not a principal focus of this paper, opportunities do exist within the commercial radio sector, through ensuring public service commitments as a requirement of licensing, for enhancing the health information environment. International radio services, often broadcast in multiple languages, fulfill a role that is part public service (often with a national or regional focus), news service, and entertainment-focused. Many international services are overtly propagandist and often reflect the foreign policy concerns of the countries from which they are broadcast.

The radio sector constitutes one of the many fields from which the rural people gain information relevant to their health and wellbeing as well as that of their animals. In resource-poor areas of developing countries, such as Nigeria especially in some parts of Northern Nigeria, lack of health information poses a serious risk to public health. There is little overall health literacy, and most of these areas lack an established communication infrastructure. Furthermore, many of the most important public health risks in the area, such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and hygiene, have important behavioral risk factors [4,5]. Health communication can help improve health outcomes for behaviors that have significant behavioral components [6]. However, focusing on the impact of community radio on the health of rural people allows examining how donor funds can support better practice in health broadcasting and radio-based health advocacy. It also provides an opportunity to examine how a specific communication sector within a wider range of communication channels and initiatives helps to contribute to improved human development outcomes. This paper is concerned with the impact of community radio on animal-human health promotion and how its services can be improved to the benefit of the rural uneducated people. It will make the governments of developing countries (including Nigeria) and health organizations to see community radio as a project to be invested in (since it has been proven as a strong medium for relating health and hygiene information to the rural people as used in other African countries), to bridge the gap between the urban and rural people as well as the literates and the illiterates in these countries (and Nigeria), thereby promoting the health and wellbeing of the rural people as well as that of the animals around them.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: CONCEPTS

Community radio attracts a lot of interest and research especially concerning its role in rural development. The potentials of community radio can be enormous or otherwise, thus it is important to ascertain the "would be" influence of community radio among rural dwellers in Nigeria based on the experience of those who have worked on community radio in other countries where similar conditions exist, such as Ghana. Such a proposal is important so that regulatory agencies such as the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and broadcast professionals in Nigeria, on the whole, will realize the awesome potential which community radio has if used appropriately when it sets foot in Nigeria. Also, this proposal might speed up the drive towards

establishing community radio stations in Nigeria. In countries where it has been used, community radio serves people at the grassroots who often have peculiar characteristics, especially in developing countries. These characteristics include hunger, poverty, disease, illiteracy, traditional mindsets, laborious methods of production, etc., which translate to the economic, health, and social implications which community radio may bring to bear.

The recent UNESCO World Culture Report (2000) reveals that levels of radio ownership in the South are significant and in certain contexts radio represents a critical information lifeline for rural men, women, and children. Comparative analysis of the density of radio and television ownership shows that in extremely poor countries such as Rwanda, for every television set owned there are 101 radio sets. Similarly, in Nepal there are 7.1 radios owned per television set, in Sierra Leone and Ethiopia this figure stands at 20.8 and 43.9 radios per television respectively [7].

The UN ICT task force (2002) adds weight to this assessment, noting that of the 816 million people living in Africa in 2001, 1 in 4 has a radio (205 million people), 1 in 13 own a television (62 million people), 1 in 40 have a terrestrial telephone line (20 million people) and 1 in 160 use the Internet (5 million people). They identify that Radio is still by far the most dominant mass medium in Africa with ownership of radio sets being far higher than any other electronic device... It is estimated that over 60 percent of the population of the sub-continent are reached by existing radio transmitter networks while national television coverage is largely confined to major towns [8].

Such evidence highlights the relevance of radio to the rural people and its potential as a tool for health broadcasting. However, media ownership is not equally distributed amongst the rich and poor, and whilst television ownership is burgeoning within certain countries (i.e. China and parts of Central Asia), television remains largely beyond the reach of the poorest.

Equally important is the extent to which radio provides a focus for community discussion and dialogue. Through everyday social communication practices, gossip, debate, chat, etc. health information may be passed from radio listeners to non-listeners, and in the process the

boundaries between targeted risk groups, audiences, and wider societal impacts become blurred. For example, few existing studies of radio and public health link between broadcasting and the passage of information within communities as social communication.

Little qualitative data exists on the active strategies in which rural people employ to obtain health information, be it from health professionals, friends, neighbors, or ICTs [3]. Though strong evidence exists regarding gender, poverty, and information inequality, there are gaps in our understanding of the strategies that women, for instance, whose public mobility may be constrained due to cultural norms, use to gather or access information concerning health. However, we do know that throughout the South women and children tend to have lower access to communications technologies than men, and the dynamics of this trend requires further investigation since inequality in access to information can result in serious inequalities in access to health services, despite the often explicit targeting of health services at women and children in the South [9].

Addressing the health information needs of the rural people requires a multi-stranded approach to building infrastructural capacity, institutional capacity, and providing the content. There is a need to increase access to new technologies for rural people, but it would also be wise to be practical and cost-effective and recognize that the 'traditional' technologies that these people use to obtain information, as well as entertainment, have a strategic role to play in realizing better health outcomes for them and their livestock.

Effective communication can help individuals and communities to engage in healthy and health-seeking behavior. This can be achieved by positively influencing variables such as self-efficacy (the confidence in one's own ability to perform a behavior), outcome expectations (the expected result of performing a behavior), knowledge, perceived risk, and social norms, whilst locating this individual behavior change in the wider socio-economic and cultural environment.

2.1 Radio

Radio is a wireless transmission that only has the audio element [10]. Thus the radio can only be listened to. This nature of radio makes the

production of programs cost-effective because few pieces of equipment are required than television. Furthermore, radio receivers are often simplistic in nature thus cheap and affordable, especially to rural people. Battery-operated radio sets make users less dependent on electricity supply and the medium is portable. Portability of the medium ensures that listeners incorporate the medium into their occupations. They are able to listen while they work instead of interrupting their daily routines. Above all, the radio is very useful in multi-ethnic developing countries like Nigeria, because it is flexible. Programs can be produced in various languages. Thus each ethnic group is given a sense of belonging and inclusion.

2.2 Community Radio

Community radio is an important concept in the uses of radio especially in developing countries of the world where there is a dire need to improve on the existing status quo. In the first place, radio use is popular at the grassroots because the medium is: affordable; has low production costs; flexible; battery operated; requires partial attention, and its signals can reach remote areas. These inherent characteristics of radio give credence to the concept of community radio. Community radio serves the needs of small groups and localities which hitherto would not have had radio service dedicated to them. Since this radio service is dedicated to them, it addresses the daily issues that affect people in these places. As a result, it channels efforts at improving the livelihoods of such people in the economic, social, health, and political sphere. The concept of community radio brings the audience into the ideation and production of programs. Members of the audience are not only listeners but active participants in the production of programs that are broadcast. Thus they have a sense of belonging and the content of the programs are more relevant and useful to wider sections of the community.

Community radio distinguishes itself because it: takes a non-profit approach; independent; owned and controlled by the community, and encourages participation by members of the community. The non-profit component of community radio ensures that it does not bow to commercial pressures which are brought to bear on the radio by advertisers, market forces, competitors, and ownership. In the absence of commercial pressure, community radio serves

only the needs and interests of its immediate audience. Decisions are made about programming based on the relevance of the latter in the community. Thus community radio is independent of government, companies, advertisers, and other groups that may influence its content. Care is taken not to digress from the independence which community radio should have. In the operation of community radio, whatever monetary gains are made are worked back into the running and management of the station. The decentralized nature of community radio ensures participation by the audience. In other words, the audience is brought together with the broadcasters and they work hand in hand. This is a key principle of participatory development. Decentralization in this respect gives a voice to the voices of local people who would ordinarily have never been heard. In this arrangement, they are allowed to express themselves; share their problems; discuss solutions to problems that affect the wider community as a whole, and; share success stories.

Community radio is defined in various ways by different authors. However, there is unity in these definitions that community radio focuses on localities and operates among the ordinary lives of local people. "Community radio, as distinct from public service broadcasting, serves to bring small communities together, focuses on common man's day-to-day concerns and helps in realizing local aspirations. In this sense, it aims to contribute to the lives of the local community, through the content that is created by the people and for the people of the community" [11].

The communities in which community radio operates often have cultural similarities so that the operation of the radio station will not be cumbersome. The day to day activities of people in these local communities often escapes the notice of public service broadcasting because such stations have a wider field of coverage and cannot go down to issues concerning local communities. "When radio fosters the participation of citizens and defends their interests; when it reflects the tastes of the majority; when it truly informs; when it helps resolve the thousand and one problems of daily life; when all ideas are debated in its programs and all opinions are respected; when cultural diversity is stimulated over commercial homogeneity; when women are main players in communication and not simply a pretty voice; when no type of dictatorship is tolerated; when

everyone's words fly without discrimination or censorship; that is community radio.". Community radio supports a democracy of voices. All voices are given a chance to be heard instead of the existing status quo (especially among developing communities in Africa) where women are relegated to the background. The definition adds a gender perspective to the definition of community radio. Women form a significant portion of African communities, yet they are often silent in many affairs [12]. Furthermore, community radio is one that is operated in the community, for the community, about the community, and by the community. The community can be territorial or geographical; a township, village, district, or island and can also be a group of people with common interests, who are not necessarily living in one defined territory [13].

Community radio is owned and run by the people whom the radio station serves. This precludes the fact that community radio is controlled or operated by external groups. Members of the community are the ones who understand issues that affect them and are in a better position to pilot their own affairs. The fact that the group of people in which community radio serves has common interests [13]. Community radio is a social process or event in which members of the community associate together to design programs and produce and air them, thus taking on the primary role of actors in their own destiny, whether this is for something as common as mending fences in the neighborhood, or a community-wide campaign on how to use clean water and keep it clean, or agitation for the election of new local leaders. With various forms of modern media, communities are bombarded with information from elsewhere. There is very little or no chance of dialogue within the community. These communities hardly (if ever) speak with one another. Community radio creates an opportunity for information sharing and discussion among people in their localities. As matters arise, they are better off putting heads together to proffer solutions and learn from the successes and failures of one another.

2.3 Community Radio in Africa

The first community radio station in Africa, Homa Bay Community Radio, was established in Kenya in 1982. Although this first community radio was short-lived, it is a landmark in the development of community radio in Africa. Elsewhere on the African continent, we have the following community radio stations: in Liberia, Radio Gbarnga, and Radio Gbehzohn; in Guinea, Mamou Rural Radio and Kindia Rural Radio and; in Sierra Leone, Radio Gbafth and Eastern Radio. Community radio is popular in South Africa too with some of the following stations: Vryburg Community Radio in the Northwest Province; Vukani Community Radio in the Eastern Cape; Unitra Community Radio and; Botlokwa Community Radio in the Northern Province [14]. There were more than 70 community radio stations in South Africa in the year 2000 and about 100 in various parts of West Africa. Ghana became the first black nation where the colonial rule came to an end and has also taken giant strides in the application of community radio to local needs. A lot can be learned by other African countries (where similar conditions exist) from the experience of community radio broadcasters in Ghana [10].

2.4 Community Radio in Nigeria

Since the advent of radio broadcasting in Nigeria, it has remained entirely an urban affair. Almost all radio stations are located in urban areas. They cater to the needs and interests of the urban dwellers in their programming [15]. Paradoxically, over 60 percent of Nigerians live in rural areas. It, therefore, means that majority of Nigerians who live in the rural areas are cut off from mainstream broadcasting as they are denied access to radio. They are therefore voiceless and could not participate effectively in the running of their affairs even under a democratic setting. In the same vein, the language of broadcasting in Nigeria is usually English. The English language is an urban language and a medium of expression for the elites in the country. The majority of the rural dwellers cannot speak or write in the language. The high illiteracy level therefore negatively affects them in terms of listening to the radio. The implication of this is that the radio could not be used to mobilize the rural dwellers effectively for development. News/information on development, health, farming, environment, knowledge acquisition, education, behavioral change and so on that could motivate the people would not be able to reach them effectively. This mass of the people will continue to remain poor and underdeveloped. Against this background, community radio has become a necessity in Nigeria. The radio will be owned by the people, managed by the people, and is not for profit. It broadcasts in the local language of the people that all will understand. Its program contents will

cater mainly to the needs and interests of the people. Community radio will, therefore, serve as a change agent in rural areas, promoting the socioeconomic status of the people.

In 2003, advocacy for the establishment of community radio in Nigeria became visible and loud. The Panos Institute of West Africa (PIWA) and the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), in conjunction with the Institute for Media and Society (IMS-Nigeria), launched an initiative on community radio in Nigeria. The steering committee which articulated an action plan put Nigerians at the forefront of the campaign. A lot of awareness was created about community radio across the country. Workshops were held to generate interest in community radio. Several meetings took place to map out strategies to demand policy, legislative, and regulatory restructuring concerning community broadcasting. In 2004, the federal government on its part, set up a working group to review the outdated National Mass Communication Policy of 1990. In 2005, the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition (NCRC) was formed by stakeholders. It consists of about 200 organizations with members located in all the geographical zones of the country. It has a common bond of social and grassroots development. The federal government went further in 2006 by setting up a committee headed by renowned communication scholar, late Professor Alfred Opubor, to develop a policy framework for the establishment of community radio stations for the country. The committee succeeded in putting together a draft policy that was submitted to the Federal Government for necessary action. The stakeholders are still waiting for the Federal Government to legislate on community radio on the guidelines for its licensing and operations. President Goodluck Jonathan's declaration in 2010 that the government will soon commence licensing of community radio is yet to come to reality [16].

A lot of challenges have continued to face Nigeria in her attempt at starting a community radio. The greatest challenge facing Nigeria is the lack of courage by the government. Nigerian governments over the years have not demonstrated strong political will for the takeoff of community broadcasting. The lack of political will is demonstrated in many ways. Nigeria is a signatory of the African Charter on Broadcasting which recommended the setting up of community broadcasting as the third tier of the broadcasting system. It remains one of the few African

countries yet to implement fully the provisions of this charter. Nigeria, to date, has not segmented the broadcast sector into the public, commercial, and community broadcasting. This is unlike what happens in sister West African countries. Even in Mali, a less endowed country, the third tier of broadcasting is further segmented into the community, co-operative, confessional, and cultural radio stations. Apart from not implementing the African charter fully, the Nigerian government has not enacted the enabling law to start and guide the operations of the community radio. NBC only made provisions for the operation and regulations of the first and second tier of broadcasting. Act 38 of 1992 and its subsequent amendment Act 55 of 1999 did not make specific provisions for the licensing of community radio. Furthermore, the existing law poses a serious challenge for any community seeking a license to own and operate a community radio station [17]. The Nigerian law provides that communities or community-based organizations and other non-profit organizations seeking legal incorporation are registered under a trusteeship with the Corporate Affairs Commission. Any organization registered in this category will not have an Article and Memorandum of Association which is required for corporate bodies to carry out commercial activities. The implication of this is that communities or non-profit organizations do not qualify to apply for broadcast licenses for ownership and operation of community ownership radio stations since they are not incorporated as limited liability companies. The government has not demonstrated commitment to the establishment of community radio by sending a bill to the national assembly, specifically making provisions for the establishment of community radio or amending the existing law to provide for community radio. Yet, a former minister of Information, Frank Nweke Jnr, in 2009, acknowledged that the delay in the take-off of community radio in Nigeria is necessitated by the desire to ensure that appropriate legal, regulatory, and administrative frameworks crucial to the success of community radio are put in place. Three years on, Nigerians are still waiting. Not even the government's declaration of its commitment to issuing licenses for community radio stations has been effected.

The former Nigerian president, Goodluck Jonathan had declared during the 8th biennial conference of African broadcasters tagged Africa 2010 that "We are aware of the need to expand the broadcast space and give more voice to the

people". Consequently, the Federal Executive Council has considered and approved the guidelines proposed by the National Broadcasting Commission for the licensing of community radio in Nigeria. Two years after, stakeholders are still waiting for the policy guideline on the licensing of community radio. Despondence has since overtaken the rank of the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition (NCRC) as they await the realization of their dream. The headquarters of the coalition in Lagos is daily besieged with inquiries about what has happened to the presidential directive. Moreover, there is a lack of an enabling environment for community radio to thrive in Nigeria. The Nigerian government not only dominates the airwaves by its covetous self-allotment radio frequencies, it sees the public service stations as agents established to protect its interests. The government has a near-monopoly of the airwaves in Nigeria; the existence of private broadcast stations notwithstanding [18].

The majority of the radio stations in Nigeria are owned by the Federal and state governments. The two levels of government-owned 81 stations as against 25 by private individuals. Private individuals face a lot of difficulties in obtaining broadcast licenses in Nigeria. This results in a long wait. The difficulties manifest in excessive-high licensing fees being paid by individual organizations. These fees range from $75,000.00 to $150,000.00 depending on the category of the license being applied for. On the contrary, the government pays little or nothing to obtain a license to set up its own station. While individuals pay through their noses to get a license in Nigeria, the situation is different in neighboring West African countries. For instance, in Mali, radio license for community radio is free provided the applicant is a Malian. In Ghana, a mere $100 (one hundred dollars) is charged for application license while the authorization fee is $2,000 (two thousand dollars). The NBC seems not prepared yet for the commencement of community radio in Nigeria. The investigation has shown the officials lack experience and training in the operation and regulation of community radio. NBC is right now pre-occupied with the transition from analog to digital broadcasting. This was a fall-out of its failed, self-imposed deadline of 2012 for the accomplishment of the same as against the 2015 deadline set by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). A digital broadcasting demonstration was carried out in Jos in 2016. Since then, not much has taken

place. Some observers opine that community radio enthusiasts will not have their dream realized until the digital transition process ends. Frequent changes in the political leadership at the information ministry constitute a minus for community radio. The careless replacement of top government officials and decision-makers has negatively affected the policy thrust of the government on community radio. Concomitant to this is bureaucratic bottlenecks in governance and annoying red tape.

However, it is no doubt that, when community radio is finally established in Nigeria, it will assist greatly in promoting the health and wellbeing of the rural populace in Nigeria. It will promote good healthy living, agriculture, adult literacy, and environmental sanitation among others.

3. BUILDING BETTER HEALTH BROADCASTING APPROACHES

For health broadcasting to have an appropriate impact and ICD initiatives more broadened, the information contained within the wide variety of formats and approaches available to producers must be both accurate and useable. Assessment of the information needs, existing knowledge, risk-taking, and health-seeking behavior of target audiences also represents a critical priority and essential element of health communications intervention planning and design.

The quality and accuracy of health information accessed by radio staff during production impacts directly upon health broadcast outputs. This is illustrated above with regard to detrimental rumors surrounding health issues, which radio can both knowingly and inadvertently exacerbate. Rumors concerning the perceived detrimental health effects of certain medical procedures, treatments, vaccinations, and so on, are as commonplace as the rumors, stigma, and discrimination that are socially constructed about diseases and the people that are both known or suspected of having them. For example, in the late 1980s in the West, media coverage of HIV/AIDS focused almost exclusively on homosexual men and female sex workers as 'vectors of HIV' [19]. This focus on so-called 'dangerous social categories' (despite epidemiological evidence to the contrary) was at the expense of 'at risk' people engaging in unprotected heterosexual sex. Importantly, the radio can help to counter negative and harmful stereotypes and promote positive community

dialogue concerning health. However, concerning HIV/AIDS, many countries still have a long way to go in coming to terms with its social, economic, and political implications. In Nigeria, for example, denial of the scale of the HIV/AIDS problem has resulted in a weak national response and paucity of targeted health promotion activities. In such contexts the public radio response tends to be moralistic, didactic, and over-technical, leading to concerns regarding the use of such broadcasting for the poor [20].

The example cited above indicates the need to work closely with risk groups and the need to enhance health information flows to key information providers such as radio stations. It also highlights the need for simple, but sound, formative research amongst the target audience before broadcasting. Concerning HIV/AIDS broadcasting, there are suggestions that broadcasting should primarily respond to the critical health information needs of the poor. Several areas relevant to the strengthening of health broadcasting were identified.

Obtaining a flow of accurate, useful, and useable health-related information and support material, combined with a community-led approach, remains the cornerstones of better health broadcasting and here, governments have a clear role to play. Rather than seeing the non-state radio sector as a critic and competitor, there is clear scope to work in partnership with the expanding community and commercial sectors for the benefit of public health. Increasingly, project partnerships are drawing broadcasters into close cooperation with NGOs in particular. Strategic attention needs to be paid to linkages with health information providers, with government ministries, and with local information providers, such as health clinics and NGOs. This will serve to increase the flow of accurate health information to radio producers, which ultimately is of benefit to listeners. Ministries of information also have a vital role to play in helping build media environments conducive to better health, through the inclusion of public service commitments for the commercial station in license agreements.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has squarely addressed the impacts of community radio on the animal-human health promotion in rural areas of African countries and this has fostered the need for it to be implemented in Nigeria seeing that state and private radio stations have not impacted positively on the lives of rural Nigerians as most of them may not understand the English language which is often used by these radio stations. Some better health broadcasting tips have been discussed to ensure that community radio attains the health needs of the rural people which is the central focus of this study. It is hoped that, when community radio is successfully established in Nigeria, it will very useful in promoting healthy and peaceful co-existence in the Nigerian society that is highly pluralistic in culture and religion. It will serve as the voice of the voiceless and give the local people a say in the running of the affairs of their country, particularly at the local level. Besides, community radio will provide jobs for the army of unemployed mass communication graduates and also serve as a training ground for others. For community, radio to achieve the laudable objectives and for Nigerians to enjoy the benefits like their West African neighbors, this paper has been able to suggest some useful recommendations.

Nigerian government should immediately provide the legal framework for the commencement of community radio in Nigeria. Licensing fees should be waived for promoters of community radio. The government should reduce import duty on equipment for community radio. The government should be transparent in the allocation of frequencies. There should be a guiding philosophy on community radio. When operational, the content of community radio should reflect local views and interests of the people. Finally, radio broadcaster should endeavor to work health organizations as well as NGOs to ensure they disseminate the health information that is from the right and reliable sources.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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