

Radio listening clubs in Malawi and Zambia: towards a participatory model of broadcasting

ABSTRACT

This paper, based upon a field research project commissioned by the Panos Institute Southern Africa, investigates the communicative efficacy of the radio listening clubs project implemented by the Institute in Malawi and Zambia. The investigation takes the form of a 'second-order interpretation' of the key findings of the field research. The findings are analysed in terms of the participatory communication model of development communication. The paper argues that the clubs live up to some of the ideal-typical attributes of participatory communication. This is evident in the following areas: (i) a propensity for social mobilisation; (ii) acquisition of skills and knowledge; (iii) communally induced motivation to listen to the radio; (iv) the possibility of interpersonal influence within groups; (v) the benefit of being 'organised' structures; (vi) the 'massive' reach of the clubs; and (vii) the dialogic interchanges between the rural-based groups and the urban-based policy-making elites.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on a study conducted on behalf of the Panos Institute Southern Africa to assess the perceived communicative efficacy of the Radio Listening Clubs Project as implemented in Malawi and Zambia by the Panos Institute.

Although the study was commissioned as a result of the Institute's interest in understanding the extent of the project's effectiveness, the study's rationale could be extended, particularly from the point of view of social research:

- Its findings would go some way towards validating the *participatory communication model*, whose ideal-typical principles are generally difficult to ascertain empirically.
- Its findings could be used to initiate *more research* into community-level communication initiatives undertaken by a variety of governmental and non-governmental organisations engaged in community development projects, such as micro-financing, agricultural information services, et cetera.

This paper incorporates only this author's 'second-order interpretation' of the findings of the field research¹ undertaken in Malawi and Zambia. 'Second-order interpretation', as an aspect of the *defocusing* qualitative analytical framework, is explained later. To foreground this interpretation, I give, firstly, a brief overview of the evolution of the radio listening clubs communication model. Secondly, I highlight the key objectives of the field research underpinning this paper, including the methods of data collection and analysis used. Thirdly, I discuss the premises of the 'development communication' theory within which the study was located. Fourthly, I undertake my second-order interpretation of the research findings in view of the ideal-typical principles of development communication.

1. OVERVIEW OF RADIO LISTENING CLUBS

The history of listening groups goes back to a time when group listening was first tried out as a method of adult education in Great Britain by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in order to overcome the 'one-way limitation of broadcasting' (in Sood, Sen Gupta, Mishra & Jacoby, 2004: 67). Later, group listening and 'teleclubs' were experimented with in France, Japan, Italy and other parts of the world, including India. In India, listening groups were first introduced to enhance the diffusion of messages from an All India Radio (AIR) – UNESCO sponsored experimental programme broadcast in rural areas. These groups played an important role in disseminating information by 'transforming a passive audience into an active participant' and the improvements in awareness and knowledge were striking (in Sood et al., 2004: 67).

In Africa, the clubs in Malawi and Zambia were patterned after the Federation of African Media Women-Southern African Development Community (FAMW-SADC) approach. Prior to the FAMW-SADC model in Zimbabwe, though, such an approach had been under experimentation elsewhere

¹ *The field research was conducted by Lupakisyo Hilary Mbobe (Malawi) and Berry Lwando (Zambia), under the general guidance of this author in his capacity as chief researcher on the research project.*

in Africa. Berrigan (1979: 48) exemplifies the Audio Cassette Listening Forums (ACLF) conducted during 1977-8 in Tanzania, using audio cassette recorders to reach and involve rural women. The project's aim was to 'provide a development programme that enabled women to recognise the importance of their role and at the same time encourage implementation of self-determined action plans primarily related to health and nutrition'.

The concept of 'listening groups', as applied to the Panos Institute's project, is perhaps misleading. If logically extended, the concept suggests a certain audience passivity – the clubs' role is merely to 'listen,' within the context of organised groupings, to the programmes transmitted by the broadcasters. It masks the fact that the audience is actively involved in the processes of producing the programmes. It hides the fact that the audience is engaged in the production of meaning, and the communicating of that meaning to other societal actors – the policy makers, ordinary citizens, et cetera. The clubs play a dual role – *technically* producing their own programmes and *socially* producing their own definitions or meanings of development. The process of production does not preclude 'listening'. So while 'listening' is, in itself, an objective of the clubs, there is a much more involved process of programme production.

In this paper, the label 'radio listening clubs' is used in the extended sense of active audience engagement in the processes of media production and meaning. In summary, the 'model', as replicated in Malawi and Zambia, involves the following:

- *Mobilisation* of rural women into radio listening clubs;
- *Training* of women in basic radio production skills, such as how to place the audio cassette recorder for maximum sound recording; voice projection; etc.
- *Moderating* skills, whereby someone is elected to serve as a programme moderator, prompting everybody to contribute as freely as possible;
- *Audio tape recordings* of issues of community concern as initiated and discussed by the women themselves (e.g. agriculture, nutrition and balanced diets, gender equality, protection against HIV/AIDS, political rights and processes, the inheritance law, traditional customs, care of children, care of orphans, education and its cost);
- *Transporting* of such recorded tapes to a central studio, in Lusaka or Blantyre, to be used by the 'producers'² assigned to the DTR project (in some instances, the women arranged to have these transported by long-distance bus drivers, whereupon the 'producer' would collect them from the bus driver at an agreed place);
- *Audio tape recordings* of mostly urban-based policy makers and/or NGO leaders responding to the issues raised on tape by the rural women;
- *Technical editing* of both recordings into one 15-minute programme;
- *Transmission* of the programme in the vernacular on the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) and the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) channels; and
- *Further discussion* by the women of the final radio programme as transmitted, resulting in a form of cyclical dialogue.

² The word 'producer' is used guardedly, because it is the women themselves who produce the programmes. It is they who conceptualise the idea, 'script' it and record it as 'sound-on-tape' (SOT). The role of the 'producer' is simply to arrange for the recording of responses from sources other than the women, and edit these together with the women's recordings.

The 'communicative efficacy' of such clubs, as understood in this paper, refers to the extent to which the operations of such clubs approximate the ideal-typical attributes underpinning development communication. These attributes are propounded in the section on 'theorising development communication'.

2. STUDY METHODOLOGY

2.1 Statement of the problem

The study sought to address the problem of using the mass media within the context of the participatory communication model. A related research problem was to review the various paradigmatic trajectories of development communication in relation to community-based communication initiatives. While conventional radio broadcasting is generally seen as unidirectional, top-down and paternalistic (cf. Gumucio-Dagron, 2001), the introduction of radio listening clubs into the equation seemed to 'tame' it into a participatory mode.

2.2 Specific objectives

The study sought to:

- outline and analyse the key features of the 'development communication' theoretical framework
- present and analyse the main findings of the field research undertaken in Malawi and Zambia
- apply the 'development communication' theory articulated to the field data presented
- draw out conclusions about the communicative efficacy of the radio listening clubs.

2.3 Data collection

The research method chosen was qualitative. It involved three techniques of data collection, namely: (i) an analysis and synthesis of key media theories and their contributions to the discourse of development communication; (ii) focus groups from among the radio listening club members; and (iii) personal interviews with individual members of the clubs, as well as with other actors in the concerned communities.

The *purposively* chosen clubs included those in the southern, western and eastern provinces of Zambia and in the Thyolo, Chiradzulu and Mangochi districts of Malawi.

Table 1: Demographic information about the respondents

Research area	Data collection technique	Category of respondents	Number of respondents
Mazabuka, Zambia	Focus group	Club members	4 groups, of 7-10 people each
Mongu, Zambia	Focus group	Club members	4 groups
Chipata, Zambia	Focus group	Club members	4 groups
Mazabuka, Mongu & Chipata, Zambia	In-depth interviews	Community members; a paramount chief, other chiefs and 'Indunas' (chiefly advisors)	At least 20 people
Mangochi, Malawi	Focus group	Tionele Radio Listening Club	At least 7 people in a group
Chiradzulu, Malawi	Focus group	M'bawa Radio Listening Club	At least 7 people in a group
Thyolo, Malawi	Focus group	Talandira Radio Listening Club	At least 7 people in a group
Mangochi, Chiradzulu & Thyolo, Malawi	In-depth interview	Traditional leaders; community members; a development partner working in an area	At least 10 people interviewed

The discussions and interviews were conducted in the local languages of the respondents, and recorded for subsequent transcription.

2.4 Data analysis

The data so collected was analysed using what Charles Puttergill (2000) calls *defocusing*. This interpretative framework refers to a situation whereby the researcher who has an open-ended approach and is receptive and does not create an unintended barrier by narrowly pursuing predetermined issues. Openness thus allows the researcher to identify appropriate issues and address questions that emerge from the particular situation (Puttergill, 2000:237).

Defocusing here employs two levels of interpretation³. Firstly, it uses 'first-order interpretations'⁴ by way of participants' or respondents' own narratives or responses (Puttergill, 2000: 239). Secondly,

³ Defocusing can also invoke a 'third-order interpretation', through which the researcher can determine the general theoretical significance of the research data.

⁴ In this paper, I have chosen not to include the 'first-order interpretations', as these would have taken up more space than is provided. In addition, such interpretations are randomly invoked by this author in his 'second-order interpretations' of the findings. This should provide a sufficient glimpse into the respondents' own narratives or responses, and thus serve as the backdrop against which to view my 'second-order interpretation'.

it uses 'second-order interpretation' whereby the researcher attempts to synthesise the findings critically and ensure they make sense in keeping with the objectives of the whole study (Puttergill, 2000:239).

In trying to evaluate the communicative efficacy of the radio listening clubs theoretically, therefore, we shall invoke the 'second-order interpretation' by framing an analysis of the field research findings in terms of the thematic categories drawn from development communication theorising.

2.5 Limitations

The findings of the field study, based on qualitative data collection as they are, may not be generalised to the entire populations in Malawi and Zambia. However, the parameters within which those findings can be generalised are defined by the communicative principles underpinning the development communication theory under review. The validity of the findings is thus determined by the extent to which the radio listening clubs model adopted by the Panos Institute approximates the ideal-typical features of the theory.

The sampling units were mostly the club members themselves. Because these were not randomly selected, their responses could be possibly be considered to be 'biased' in that they, would be expected to say positive things about the clubs of which they were members. A counterargument could be that the whole purpose of this research project was to the ultimate benefit of such people.

A final limitation to highlight is this researcher's disregard for 'grounded theory', namely this researcher's inability to construct theory on the basis of the data provided. The theoretical assumption made, largely to do with the research brief from the Panos Institute, was that of development communication. The 'grounded theory' approach (Puttergill, 2000: 238) would probably have enabled this researcher to engage in a 'third-order interpretation' of the research data, namely building theory on the basis of the data. This would probably have given this researcher more freedom to consider other possible theoretical explanations. However, the development communication theory was the one organising and explanatory paradigm for the research data.

3. THEORISING DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

This literature review achieves two objectives. Firstly, it discusses the premises of development communication theory and its implications for participatory radio. Secondly, it gives examples of projects undertaken in the tradition of development communication.

3.1 The theoretical premises of development communication

Servaes (1996) notes that most notions of development communication revolve around the 'diffusion' and the 'participatory' approaches to the linkage between development and communication. It is important to underscore the fact that McQuail extends the concept of 'participatory' approach *per se* and speaks instead of the 'democratic participatory' theory. Whether 'participatory' or 'democratic

participatory', both scholars would appear to be making reference to the 'centrifugal' tendencies of the media that focus on diversity, plurality, change, et cetera (McQuail, 1987:94-96).

The observation by Servaes (1996) notwithstanding, it is probably more accurate to suggest that there are several trajectories along the development-communication paradigmatic continuum (Tomaselli [sd]; Huber, 1998). Another point to underscore is that although some paradigms, notably the modernisation model, have been discredited in academic literature, they are still very much a part of contemporary communication-in-development practices among key donor agencies (Huber 1998).

The next section discusses the premises of development communication theory.

3.1.1 *The diffusion/modernisation model*⁵

The diffusion model, fashioned after the 'modernisation' approach to development, was represented in the main by such scholars as Walt W Rostow (1960), Everett M Rogers (1962) and Daniel Lerner (1958), who posited development communication as an engine of change from the 'traditional' to the 'modern' society. According to Fjes (in Melkote, 1991: 38), "it was generally assumed that a nation became truly modern and developed when it arrived at the point where it closely resembled Western industrial nations in terms of political and economic behaviour and institutional attitudes towards technology and innovation, and social and psychic mobility".

The model stressed three elements. First, the 'psycho-sociological' element entailed 'empathy', or the capacity to see oneself in the other fellow's situation. There was a correlation between the expansion of economic activity being equated with 'development' and a set of 'modernising' variables, chief among which are urbanisation, literacy, mass media use, and democratic participation (Lerner, 1958). The second element highlighted the mass media as an 'institutional' nexus of modernising practices and institutions in society, functioning as 'watchdogs', 'policymakers' and 'teachers for change and modernisation' (Shramm, 1964; cf. Rostow, 1960). The third posited 'technological' advances as pivotal to the growth of productive agricultural and industrial sectors and therefore the transfer of technical know-how from the developed North was seen as extremely crucial for development in the Third World nations (Melkote, 1991:24-29).

Jo Ellen Fair (1989; cf. Fair & Shah, 1997), in her examination of over 140 studies of communication and development, concluded that in the 1987-1996 period, Lerner's modernisation model completely disappears. She noted that the most frequently used theoretical framework was participatory development, an optimistic post-modern orientation, which is almost the polar opposite of Lerner who viewed mass communication as playing a top-down role in social change. Also vanishing from research in this latter period was the two-step flow model, which was drawn upon by modernisation scholars.

⁵ Although this is not the subject of this study per se, I should note here that post-structuralist thinking, like Pierre Bourdieu's (1992) 'reflexivity', has reshaped the debate about modernisation to a point where Anthony Giddens now speaks of a 'reflexive modernity', implying that society is becoming increasingly more self-aware, reflective, and hence reflexive (Bryant, 2002). The basic assumption here is that 'reflexive modernisation' enables scholars to reflect upon modernity's own questioning of authority associated with the Enlightenment, as well as calling into question the naturalised elements of the structure of modernity. For example, industrial modernity began to erode with the environmental issue, which called into question basic premises of European thought and activity – the notion of limitless growth, the certainty of progress or the contrasting of nature and society (in Adlong, 2006).

However, towards the close of the 1990s, the diffusion/modernisation perspective found its re-articulation in the 1998/99 World Bank's *Knowledge for Development World Development Report*, with its emphasis on the centrality of information and knowledge in poverty alleviation and the corresponding 'knowledge bank' strategy (World Bank 1999).

The next section discusses the participatory communication model.

3.1.2 The participatory communication model

The model lies within the paradigm of 'another development' (Melkote, 1991: 220). This model emphasises the importance of the cultural identity of local communities, as well as democratisation and participation at all levels. It signals a development strategy which is not merely inclusive of, but largely emanating from, the traditional receivers. Central to this model are the concepts of participation, cultural identity and empowerment and also of the Freirian notions of dialogical communication (Servaes [sd]).

Communication therefore becomes more "concerned with process and context, that is on the exchange of 'meanings', and on the importance of this process, namely, the social relational patterns and social institutions that are the result of and are determined by the process" (Servaes [sd]). 'Another' communication thus favours what McQuail has referred to as "multiplicity, smallness of scale, locality, de-institutionalisation, interchange of sender-receiver roles and horizontality of communication links at all levels of society" (McQuail, 1987: 97). In a sense, this is a shift from the positivist-instrumentalist approach of the modernisation paradigm towards a model that is less quantitative, and more qualitative and normative (Melkote, 1991: 234).

As an extension of Paulo Freire's dialogical pedagogy, participatory communication becomes a process of 'conscientisation' in which dialogue is both more receiver-centred and more conscious of social structure. Freire (1996) argues that in the traditional pedagogical systems, the receivers were supposed to be uncritical and passive, ingesting the world view of the elites and then perceiving their problems and needs in terms of the elite-dominated rationality. He called for a new dialogical pedagogy in which the receiver would be liberated from his/her mental inertia, penetrate the ideological mist imposed by the elites, and perceive the realities of his/her existence. It is within the context of this conscientisation that theory can be appropriated as praxis for social and political transformation.

Participatory communication is thus predicated on the notion of 'empowerment'. Rensburg (1994) sees 'empowerment' as a move to inform and motivate the community to advance development in a way that may *not* turn out to be no more than 'paternalism', a 'de-empowering' phenomenon which entails 'acting out a fatherly role by limiting the freedom of the subject by well-meant rules, guidelines and regulations'. Participatory communication entails a great deal of emphasis on what Rensburg calls 'grassroots participation'. In that sense, argues Rensburg, participatory communication tends to be pluralistic and does not suffer from the authoritarian overtones of the dominant paradigm. It enables the community to set its own priorities and standards, which may be unique to its problem situations.

It is important to note that some other literature identifies such other models of development communication as the dependency model, the development-support-communication (DSC) model and the UNESCO 'sponsored' discourse of diversity, dialogue and development (3Ds) (Tomaselli, [sd]; Huber, 1998; cf. Melkote, 1991).

The dependency model mounted a severe critique of the modernisation paradigm, mainly influenced by South and Central American social movements. The 'dependistas', as they became known, examined relations between the First and Third Worlds in terms of relations of exploitation and dependency. According to them, 'development', in fact, leads to the underdevelopment of the Third World periphery and the concentration of wealth in Western metropolises. Dependency theorists, however, were unable to offer any solutions to the problem of exploitative international economic relations and their impact at micro levels (Tomaselli [sd]).

The development support communication paradigm arose as a middle path between the modernisation and dependency theories. This form of development communication is focused on co-equal, little-media-centred government-with-people communication. It assumes the presence of the development support communicator who mediates between technical experts and their beneficiaries (Melkote, 1991: 262). It is important to mention that DSC does not necessarily make sense to target audiences who are excluded from the message-making process (Tomaselli [sd]).

An emerging theme of development communication is one focusing on the integrity of different cultures, ontologies and ways of making sense. It incorporates all of the above paradigms, while stressing dialogue, diversity and development. It elevates national and local cultural preferences. For example, 'irrationality' is now conceived of as 'diversity'. Dialogue rather than imposition deals with ontological differences. DSC and participation are the key elements in this approach (Tomaselli [sd]).

Several studies, conducted in some of the paradigmatic traditions of development communication, are cited in the next section.

3.2 Case studies

Josiah (1994), conducting research on *social mobilisation through animation for participatory development in Sierra Leone*, sought to find out how 'animators' created and stimulated awareness among communities about 'the reality in which they live.' To create this awareness, animators or 'skilled interveners' conducted 'listening surveys'. These were conducted by a team of community members including the animator to identify community problems. After the survey, the animator held a series of meetings and at these meetings and during home visits, animators dialogued with community members and families to make them more aware of their life situations. This set in motion a process of reflection and analysis which stimulated the communities to explore what initiatives they could undertake to change the reality with which they were faced.

Thomas (1996) likens this approach to Freire's espousal of another kind of development based on participation, dialogue and local control. It is also consistent with the argument of Servaes

(1994) that the participatory (research) process must be underpinned by (i) a collective definition and investigation of a problem by a group of people struggling to deal with it, those embedded in the social context; (ii) group analysis of the underlying causes of their problems; and, (iii) group action to attempt to solve the problem.

In Zambia, Sibalwa undertook a study on 'radio farm forums' (Sibalwa, 2000). Sibalwa's study was designed to investigate the impact of the programmes produced by the farm forums on small-scale farming communities in Zambia. It also looked at the extent to which farmers applied the knowledge gained through the forums.

The forums were of three types. The first were government-supported forums, supplied with radio sets and batteries, stationery, technical advice and booklets written in local languages. The second were the self-sponsored forums, run by members of the forums themselves, their self-sponsorship extending to buying their own radio sets and batteries. The third were NGO-run, whereby the NGO purchased radio sets and batteries, although the ultimate objective was the self-sustainability of the forums (Sibalwa, 2000: 121).

The forums were based on the traditional lifestyle in rural communities. The groups were a self-help activity, organised into groups of 15 small-scale farmers who would listen to a weekly 30-minute programme in vernacular languages at selected venues. There were no restrictions on where groups should meet: they could decide to meet either in a house or under a tree _ anywhere where there would be no obstruction to effective listening and discussions (Sibalwa, 2000: 121).

The study established that 90.8% of the respondents found the programmes 'relevant'. The length of the programme met with the approval of 70.4%, while 81.25% of the respondents reported that the programmes were easy to follow in their own languages, and 52.5% reported that they had learnt 'new methods of farming'. Thus the study concluded that there was 'change in agricultural practices and behaviours', with the result that 'farmers have become receptive to new ideas. This is useful for their acceptance of new ideas in other areas of development' (Sibalwa, 2000: 124-130).

The study noted such problems as: (i) sustaining the farm forums; (ii) follow-up on the implementation of the information disseminated on radio, especially in areas where there was no agricultural extension officer; and (iii) poor reception in some parts of the country, largely because of the low-wave output of the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) transmitters.

Sibalwa's study was located in the tradition of Rogers's 'adoption of innovations' model, whereby 'modernising values' were injected into the receivers of information who were then expected to act upon them (Rogers, 1995). This still typified a top-down communication process, with 'agricultural extension officers' on hand for technical advice. The forums nevertheless gave positive evaluations of the programmes to which they listened.

Another study worth citing is aptly entitled "'Come gather around together': an examination of radio listening groups in Fulbari, Nepal" (Sood et al., 2004). The research problem focused on not only

how mass media communication was related to positive contraceptive behaviour, but also on whether audience involvement in the form of radio listening groups could magnify this association (Sood et al., 2004: 64).

The researchers claimed that there is 'little doubt that mass media communication campaigns can be effective in stimulating interpersonal communication' and that 'recent research on the effects of entertainment-education interventions also suggests that talking to others about campaign messages can lead to behavior change' (Sood et al., 2004: 64-65).

The methodology employed by Sood et al (2004) involved a comparison of three groups based on exposure to the radio programmes. One group included those respondents exposed to both the radio programme and the listening groups; the second those exposed only to the programme; and the third those exposed to neither the radio programme nor the listening groups.

The study concluded that: (i) exposure to the radio programmes and the listening groups was more positively related to knowledge about modern methods of family planning; and (ii) persons who were exposed to the radio programmes and were members of listening groups were more likely to discuss family planning methods with their spouses. Furthermore, members of listening groups were most likely to discuss family planning with friends and relatives (Sood et al., 2004: 79-81).

This study also resurrects the 'modernisation' paradigm of development communication, indicating its continued influence on scholarly communication research. It harks back to Rogers's 'adoption of innovations' model. However, it acknowledges that the efficacy of mass media is related to the involvement of the audience in the listening groups.

This is also true of Sibalwa's study: the use of the listeners' own language in the forums amounted to some form of 'cultural' involvement of the people in the process of communication. Although the farm forums were *message-centred*, the study showed that the participants were more inclined towards discussing the messages among themselves. This process of dialogue enabled the participants to appropriate the message within the context of their own socio-cultural realities.

4. SECOND-ORDER ANALYSIS OF THE FIELD RESEARCH FINDINGS

In keeping with Puttergill's *defocusing* interpretative framework, I now turn to a 'second-order interpretation' of the field research findings upon which this paper is based. To do so, and in keeping with the theoretical premises of development communication reviewed above, I shall use the following analytical categories: (i) communication as a process of social mobilisation; (ii) skills and knowledge acquisition as empowerment; (iii) communal motivation to listen to the radio; (iv) interpersonal influence in groups; (v) the power of organisation; (vi) the aura of the mass audience; and (vii) dialogic exchange between the clubs and policy-making elites.

4.1 Communication as a process of social mobilisation

There is evidence to suggest that the Panos Institute used the clubs as a forum for mobilising members of the community to support a specific cause. The cause could be variously defined, depending on the needs of the community and those of the project initiator, but mostly focusing on issues of democracy, development, empowerment, et cetera. In both Malawi and Zambia, it is clear that many members of the clubs viewed themselves as an entity of solidarity, bound together in their desire to extricate themselves from the effects of poverty on their communities.

As the clubs solidified, as the channel of intra-club communication became entrenched, the communities moved towards some self-reliance and self-governance by grouping into broad-based, multipurpose community organisations. The clubs enhanced their capacities to plan and manage participatory and sustainable local development effectively to enable them to uplift their living standard.

In some cases, however, there already existed some social structures for community engagement. Where these were strong, the clubs were equally strong, demonstrating that communication as a socially mobilising project is more effective when organically evolved. Indeed, wherever the clubs were strong, there was a further strengthening of the social bonds already existing in that community. People became part of a network of social relationships that could provide fertile ground for 'interpersonal influence' as postulated in the study by Sibalwa (2000) and Sood et al. (2004).

Evident in the first-order interpretation of the findings were socially binding statements made by several respondents. For instance, in Malawi, along with the 'learning opportunities' provided by the clubs, was the feeling of comradeship and friendship emanating from the constant union the club members enjoyed as they worked together on projects. In fact, in some instances, this feeling was so strong that one respondent referred to it as 'loving' one another. This author characterised this phenomenon as 'communicative solidarity' to emphasise the fact that the sense of togetherness emanated from the act of communalistic communication. This would perhaps accord with Pasquali's characterisation of communication as *koinonia* (Greek term for 'fellowship') and *communitas* (Latin term for 'community'), representing a high level of 'human relations' in which people can consciously relate to one another and form community (Pasquali, 2003: 197).

4.2 Skills and knowledge acquisition as empowerment

The members of the clubs were 'equipped' or 'empowered' with basic techno-social skills, ranging from the ability to communicate publicly to the capability to do simple radio recordings. This served to 'demystify' the technology of radio, and the members thus became more comfortable 'negotiators' of the meanings mediated by radio. They became an active audience, discursively constructing their own social world and, in that sense, feeling a sense of 'power' to influence decision making at different levels.

This coincides with the notion of co-creation and interaction implied in the participatory model, which conceives of media audiences, not as mere consumers of mediated products, but as active participants in the creation and negotiation of meaning. This, in a way, amounts to what Martin Allor (in Boyd-Barrett & Newbold, 1996: 543) referred to as 'relocating the site of the audience' – relocation, perhaps, from the site of consumption to the site of construction.

The clubs enabled their members to participate in producing knowledge, creating meaning, and communicating it. The clubs, through the radio sets given to them by the Panos Institute, also enabled the members to acquire fresh knowledge about development. One can suggest that when the technology of radio is seen largely as beyond the reach of non-professionals, there is a certain detachment even from the very process of listening to the radio. When people hear their voices, voices recorded by them, there is a certain degree of control. For instance, there was a general feeling of esteem associated with being heard on radio and thereby becoming the centre of focus in the community. One respondent in Chiradzulu (Malawi) put it aptly: 'They admire us judging by the enquiries they make about what we do. We explain to them what this is all about and they have often made complementary remarks because this is new here in Chiradzulu.' Another put it as follows: 'Indeed we have learnt a lot. One of the things is public speaking which enables us to participate in producing the radio programme.'

One must note here the respondents' appreciation for and use of the 'techno-social' skills they acquired. The transfer of technical skills was an aspect of the diffusion paradigm, showing that contemporary development-communication practice tends towards skills impartation as espoused by the modernisation model. The difference was that this particular skills transfer was combined with other, more enduring social skills, such as moderating, and participating in group discussions.

4.3 Communal motivation to listen to the radio

Listening to the radio was a function of the socio-communal nature of the clubs. The fact that the members of the clubs had their voices recorded, and, the expectation that these voices would be broadcast nationally, would seem to have motivated them to stay tuned to the radio. That process of continual socio-communal engagement with radio might have resulted in other positive outcomes, such as listening to other developmental programmes and appropriating relevant meanings from them. This act of engaged listening was a socio-communally induced act. Everybody expected everybody else to be listening to the radio. In addition, the very fact that other community members who were not necessarily members of the clubs would listen 'compelled' the club members to monitor how 'their' productions were being received within the community.

In Malawi, especially, the respondents listened to all the targeted radio programmes on the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) channel 1. The respondents easily isolated MBC 1 as their preferred channel, showing that they had a 'productive' relationship with MBC 1. After all, it carried the programmes produced by themselves, and listened to by themselves. It can be concluded, therefore, that active participation in the actual production of a programme by a section of the

population can influence the frequency and intensity with which that section of the population will listen to the medium that carries that programme.

Another factor accounted for the social listening. The design of the project was such that any subsequent recordings depended on the previous programme. The cyclical nature of the production ensured a continual listening engagement.

4.4 Interpersonal influence in group discussions

There was evidence of behavioural change in a number of areas, not least the use of new information about health practices, microcredit schemes, et cetera. But this behaviour change was more a function of interpersonal influence within the clubs than of the radio programmes themselves. As noted above, the formation of the clubs probably resulted in stronger social bonds among the members. This created a network of social relationships that was more likely to reinforce positive 'behavioural' change, if that change was collectively desirable. What is conceptualised as 'interpersonal influence' (see Sood et al., 2004) was probably made possible within the context of the group dynamics in the clubs. The members themselves, not necessarily the programmes, became the 'mediators' of influence among each other, kneading the programme contents into their own life experiences and appropriating their meanings within the context of their social relationships.

Whoever benefited from applying some technique learnt on radio would become 'influential' within the group. This demonstrates that the club members were not 'atomised', helpless and disconnected from one another. 'Influence' emanated from within the social relationships inherent in the groups, and from the knowledge of a collective strength radiating from their purposeful social interconnectedness. In the process of interaction within the groups or community 'organisations', there were possibilities for 'social action'. Social action, according to Max Weber (in Scott et al., 1996: 57) emerges when individuals within groups or organisations ponder their behaviour within the context of the behaviour of others. Individual behaviour thus becomes oriented in its course. In other words, shared meanings are indispensable to collective activity, binding the clubs in a communicative solidarity of 'social action' or 'interpersonal influence.'

4.5 The power of 'organisation'

The fact that the clubs were able to attract outside microcredit financing and other material support can be attributed to their 'organisational' structure. In some places, the clubs had become so organised as to present clear lines of accountability. The knowledge that the clubs were organised structures, complete with rules and decision-making processes, presented an attractive forum for several development partners and policy-making elites to work with the clubs. The clubs seemed to inspire a sense of 'global' influence and prestige among the club members, well beyond the village, their immediate 'locality'. They could feel a sense of belonging within a larger body politic. This sense of being a part of something larger than their immediate environ might well explain their being enamoured of the project.

For instance, in Malawi, the respondents knew that their association with 'national' microfinance institutions was largely a result of the fact that they were sufficiently 'organised' to warrant the support. In Thyolo, where national development partners were implementing their projects through the clubs, one respondent, Catherine Chabwera, a Malawi Media Women's Association (MAMWA) member, pointed out that the clubs acted as surety for the members to benefit from microfinancing and other ventures. Indeed, one development actor in Malawi, Wezi Ngalamira, the executive director of Women Empowerment Network (WEN), stressed this point and asserted that her organisation found it more effective to deal with organised grassroots structures.

In eastern Zambia, a listening group in Chipangali reported that the First Lady Maureen Mwanawasa, upon listening to one of their programmes, undertook to provide material to support their club. Another group in Mongu, western Zambia, commended the Panos Institute 'for giving us this chance' to be organised around radio listening and influence their area Member of Parliament, the Hon. Crispin Sibeta who, according to them, 'doesn't want to answer us, but we know he is listening and now he knows the developments that are taking place here'.

This realisation that the urban power structures could be reached emboldened the women to become more organised around common concerns. One might argue that the clubs' 'power' was ascribed to them by the quality of 'organisation'. Politicians would not like to be seen to be neglecting their 'organised' electorate, so some of them were easily persuaded to respond to the women's concerns.

This reinforces the observation by Gumucio-Dagron (2001) that in communities that have been marginalised, repressed or simply neglected during decades, participatory communication contributes towards cultural pride and self-esteem. It reinforces the social fibre through the strengthening of local and indigenous forms of organisation. It protects tradition and cultural values, while simultaneously facilitating the integration of new elements.

4.6 The aura of the mass audience

There was evidence to suggest that the *national* reach of the clubs' radio programmes encouraged greater social cohesion among the club members. The fact that the programmes were broadcast nationally on *mainstream* radio appeared to ignite a sense of *national* belonging in the rural-based club members. The members felt that they were contributing towards something greater than the sum of its parts, namely the overall governance of their lives. In a word, the *local* voices became enmeshed with the *national* development agenda.

It was also evident that the club members felt that their national reach accorded them greater capacity to influence key decisions both at the local and the national levels. This conclusion seemed consistent with some comments made by respondents in various places. For instance, as noted elsewhere, a club in western Zambia commended the Panos Institute 'for giving us this chance again of being on *air for everybody to hear*' (own emphasis). They used their programme to challenge

their area MP to respond to their development needs and problems. The fact that they were on air nationally made them believe that they had a wide enough reach to draw their otherwise urban-based MP into their discussions. In Limulunga, north-western Zambia, a respondent reported that 'in our discussion in the year 2003, we asked the government to build a mortuary for us here at Limulunga Clinic and this mortuary is almost completed, they have already brought the fridges. We also requested for Limulunga Nang'oko Road to be graded and they are working on this road now...'

In Malawi, a Mrs. Masiye of M'bawa Radio Listening Club in Chiradzulu, observed that 'we are now able to ask for loans or complain about the scarcity of maize in ADMARC⁶ markets. Some of these issues have since been taken up by the appropriate authorities'. This underscored the clubs' belief that their messages had an audience so 'massive' as to include national leaders, ordinary people, service providers, et cetera. As a respondent in Thyolo, Malawi, put it: 'Our facilitators linked us with service providers who in turn had a discussion with our member of parliament.' Indeed, a radio listening group in Chiradzulu complained about a cartel in the area that was buying maize (Malawi's staple food crop) in bulk at a cheap price from ADMARC, and was reselling the same to local residents at exorbitant prices. Soon after they expressed their worries, the Minister of Agriculture and Food Security, Mr. Uladi Mussa, responded and assured them that their problem was being looked into.

4.7 Dialogic exchange between the clubs and policy-making elites

The knowledge that policy-making elites - governmental and non-governmental – would respond to their concerns gave the club members a sense of dialogic engagement. They were contributing to local and national discussions about the kinds of issues that they cared about. The clubs provided a channel through which they could contact the hitherto 'amorphous' centres of social, political, and economic power almost on a co-equal basis, and challenge them on questions regarding their 'own' development. This dialogic exchange enabled them to 'converse,' from a position of collective power, with those they would otherwise not meet in person.

To re-use one Malawian anecdote: one club's complaint about a cartel that was bulk-buying maize from a local maize marketing company and reselling it to them at exorbitant prices was taken up by the Minister of Agriculture and Food Security who, in turn, weighed in on the company's acting General Manager to resolve the problem. Indeed, ad hoc committees were set up in all the depots to oversee the entire exercise.

Here was an example of how one club influenced the local and national structure of decisionmaking, implicating several power-wielding elites in a dialogic exchange that saw the resolution of the conflict in favour of the club members.

⁶ ADMARC stands for Agricultural Development and Marketing Corporation.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper has given an overview of the concept of radio listening clubs, showing that it hails from different cultural contexts, and that its primary concern was with expanding the participation of ordinary people in broadcasting. Although the label 'radio listening' seems to overemphasise the act of 'listening', this study has shown that such clubs also have a more participative, production-oriented aspect to them.

To analyse the communicative efficacy of the radio listening clubs in Malawi and Zambia, the paper has outlined the theoretical premises of development communication, concluding that development communication has evolved from a more 'diffusionist' perspective to a 'participatory' one. The paper has noted that the 'diffusion' or 'modernisation' aspect of development communication, though discredited in academic literature, is still evident, particularly in development projects across the globe. This study has established that the discourse of development communication is continually evolving, rejecting/reinterpreting some elements of diffusion, dependency, development support communication, participation and the 3Ds (diversity, dialogue and development).

With specific reference to the Panos Institute's project, the paper has observed that the formation of the radio listening clubs by the institute was underpinned by the notion of participatory communication, particularly the idea of empowering rural communities to decide their own destinies and influence whatever 'development' interventions may be designed from the urban centres.

Using a second-order interpretive framework, this author has integrated the findings of the field research commissioned by the Institute to investigate the communicative efficacy of the project. The integrated findings of the research seem to confirm some of the conclusions of an earlier study conducted by Warnock (2001) to the effect that the clubs do 'empower' their members. This empowerment is defined by the respondents in a variety of ways, organised according to the following themes:

- *Propensity for social mobilisation:* The study establishes that the clubs serve as an effective instrument for mobilising rural women around key development issues, such as poverty alleviation, farming, health care, et cetera. In those areas where there are pre-existing community-developmental structures, the clubs act as 'cement' or 'glue', providing the members with a common media/communicative outlet for their agendas.
- *Acquisition of skills and knowledge as empowerment:* The study confirms that the project played a 'technological' role through the supply of radio cassette recorders and the imparting of skills to use them. Although the equipment used was not of a professional nature, it still served to place the 'technology' of radio firmly in the hands of the people, creating in them a sense of empowerment.
- *Communally induced motivation to listen to the radio:* The study demonstrates that the clubs provided the social network through which the club members listened to, and evaluated, the radio programmes. The need to listen to the radio was built into the design of the project. In

most cases, the club members' discussions were cumulative, building upon preceding programmes.

- *Interpersonal influence within groups*: The research found evidence that the clubs provided an enabling environment for personal influence to permeate the relationships among the club members. The success of one group member as a result of implementing some solution suggested by the programmes was enough motivation for others to emulate.
- *'Institutional' capacity*: The research confirmed that the organisational structure of the clubs, lean though it was, was correlated to the material and other support given to the clubs. This is particularly evident with regard to micro-financing institutions that gave soft loans to the clubs.
- *Mass communication*: The study ascertains that there was a positive correlation between the *mass-communicated* radio programmes and the club members' feelings of *national influence*.
- *Dialogic communication*: The research corroborated the findings of earlier studies about the clubs acting as channels of communicative dialogue within the groups, and between the groups and the largely urban-based policy-making elites.

To varying degrees, the conclusions reached above approximate the various paradigmatic trajectories of development communication, particularly the participatory model of communication, as well as the 3Ds (dialogue, diversity and development). The evidence adduced also seems to suggest that the diffusion model can be applied, albeit to a lesser extent, to an understanding of the clubs' workings, particularly the radio-technology skills transfer and its attendant benefits for the club members. The overall conclusion, however, is that radio listening clubs are an efficacious form of participatory communication.

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