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Popular Participation takes more than an open microphone: Reluctance to Participate in Community Radio Production among the Rural Women in Southwest Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Advocacy for the establishment of community radio in Africa was driven by many assumptions, one of which was that once the medium of communication was liberally available, community members of all categories would begin to speak truth to power. This study aimed to investigate the extent to which community radio encourages participation in women-centred radio production. Using a focus group discussion approach, the study was conducted with rural women, and interviews were also conducted with producers of women-centred programmes in selected community radio stations. Findings revealed that the discussant embraced the community radios as their own, but many of them were reluctant to be part of radio content production. Findings also revealed that the reluctance to participate is borne out of the fear of making statements on the radio that might offend powerful people, the fear of losing sales as a result of closing shops to honour stations' invitation as voluntary media producers, and the fear of technology. As a result of this reluctance, producers have continued to depend on the same set of elite women and professionals in the rural community. For community radio to fully ignite participation among women, it will take more than opening the studios to them and operating an open microphone. Social, economic, political, and technological constraints have to be addressed on a much broader scale.

Keywords: Community, Community Radio, Programmes, Rural Women, Women Empowerment

1.0 INTRODUCTION

One of the appeals of community radio has been its potential to promote grassroots participation. Participation, itself a problematic term, essentially requires the opening up of civic, political, economic, and other spheres for the plural agency of everyone, especially that of those who, for historical, cultural, and other reasons, have been restricted to the margins of these spheres. In many parts of the world, these include women and minorities. Community radio is considered to be a major inroad for the excluded majority to access those spheres. From its beginnings in the 1940s as a social movement tool in Latin America, to its emergence in Africa in 1982, specifically in Homa Bay, Kenya, community radio has ridden on the crest of its ability to engender participation (Shailashree & Lokesh, 2025; Ojebode, 2013; Huesca, 1988).

In 2015, following about thirty years of sometimes intense advocacy for community radio licensing led by the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition (NCRC), Nigeria joined the league of nations that

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have community radio stations (Ojebode & Akingbulu, 2009). Within nine years, the number of community radio stations rose from five to eighty-nine (Ajisafe, 2024). From government officials to academics and to community radio advocacy groups, notably the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition (NCRC), the expectation has been that community radio opens up the space for participation among rural and marginal communities and ultimately leads to participation, development, and the nurturing of democratic values.

As in many cases of social advocacy, a smooth causal pathway has always been assumed between opening up the channels of communication and people getting involved in the communication process. While examples of this abound, confounding situations wherein communication channels are opened, but citizens still maintain a distance from the channel invite a nuanced examination of this assumption. The objectives of this paper were:

(1) Examine the efforts of community radio stations to promote women's participation in the production of women's empowerment programmes.
(2) Investigate if rural poor women participated
(3) If they did not participate, examine what factors held them back from participating.

2.0 Literature review: Community radio and popular participation

Popular participation refers to the active and deliberate involvement of citizens in the decision-making processes that shape their political, social, and economic environments. It is a cornerstone of democratic governance and development theory, emphasising the role of ordinary people—not just elites—in influencing public policy and societal outcomes (Duru & Badrdeen, 2026; Senior, Salaj, Johanse & Lohne, 2023; ECLA, 1973).

As simple as the term 'participation' appears, it has generated significant academic disquisitions. Terms such as putting the people in charge, putting people in the driver's seat, and leading from behind have been used to describe what participation is and is not. Of all attempts to cut through this fog, Arnstein's 'ladder of participation', propounded over five decades ago, continues to be handy in distinguishing the different levels of citizen control in conceptions of participation (Arnstein, 1969). According to her, many forms of action described as participation end up being manipulation, which is really not participation. The highest form of participation is 'citizen power', which is common people, rather than elites, being in total control of a project, situation, or policy. Between manipulation and citizen power is a spectrum of citizens' control, with the ladder totalling eight rungs.

Defined as a not-for-profit radio station established and managed by the community for the community, for social development, diversity, and inclusion (AMARC, 2007), community radio is framed and expected to promote popular participation through a variety of direct and indirect mechanisms. Through community radio, citizens make direct input into government policies by talking and debating about them. It is expected that such inputs are taken into account

in the government's policy processes and outcomes.

In addition to creating that space for popular input into government decision-making, community radio also enables citizens to hold government accountable to their duties and promises. Ojebode (2019a) documents examples of citizens monitoring government projects and raising alarms on community radio whenever they sensed policy derailment, substandard deliverables or any form of malfeasance, just as Cabrera-Balleza (2008) demonstrated how community radio promoted women's participation in governance.

Beyond these, citizens also leverage their community radio for environmental surveillance, and mobilise internally for community development activities (Ojebode, 2013). They also use community radio for rights advocacy (Zamallo, 2008).

Many stations directly involve their audiences in active content creation and decision-making. Designed by the people and for the people, these stations operate what is called the 'open microphone', a style that allows listeners to actively and directly voice their experiences, aspirations and requests in the studio or out there in the community (Huesca, 1988).

Women and the bottom of the bottom

Despite their huge population, women are greatly disadvantaged. As the UN Secretary General put it in 2020, "poverty has a woman's face" (United Nations, 2020: para 7). More women are living in poverty than men in the world. According to Statista (2023), before the COVID-19 pandemic, 207 million men were living in poverty globally compared with 219 million women. After the pandemic, the number of men living in poverty increased to 236 million, while that of women rose to 247 million. About 60% of people living in poverty are women, and the female poverty rate (12.5% globally) is higher than the male which is (12.1% globally) (Economic Commission for Europe, 2019).

These figures are higher in Africa than the world averages. Women's poverty is caused by a myriad of factors such as inability of women to own land in some parts of the world. According to Clare (2025) only 10% of land owners in Nigeria are women. This means women at times cannot practice agriculture except as tenanted farmers, having to render unpaid care work, including domestic care for children when the men are busy working and earning an income, or having to spend a good part of their income on childcare.

Beyond living in poverty, women are also victims of domestic, gender-based or intimate partner violence. According to the World Bank Group (2019), about one in every three women experiences gender-based violence. The Group further states that:

> 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. Globally, 7% of women have been sexually assaulted by someone other than a partner. Globally, as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner. 200 million women have

> experienced female genital mutilation/cutting (World Bank Group, 2019: para 1).

Violence against women has a direct negative impact on a nation's development. A bruised and brutalised woman cannot contribute her quota to economic development as she has to be absent from work to heal, or even spend her income on accessing treatment. The emotional trauma that comes from violence against women also means they cannot function to the best of their ability at work, at home, and in social circles. The World Bank Group (2019) estimated that violence against women costs countries up to 3.7% of their GDP.

In addition to living in poverty and being victims of violence, women are also victims of workplace discrimination. The gender pay gap refers to unequal pay for equal jobs, and this unequal pay is against women. According to the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (2020: para. 5), "only 47% of women of working age participated in the labour market, compared to 74% of men – a gender gap that has remained relatively constant since 1995".

Even where women can access employment in the formal sector, there is the "glass ceiling," a phenomenon that describes the invisible limit placed on women that prevents them from rising to the top management decision. The United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (2020) observes that only 28% of managerial positions globally were held by women, and only 18% of companies surveyed had a female Chief Executive Officer.

A McKinsey and Company report (2023) shows that for 100 males promoted to manager, only 87 females were promoted to the same rank, globally. In the informal sector, the situation is not better for women: women work harder but earn less (ILO, 2012). The conditions and situations of women are generally bad, but the case is much worse for women in Africa

The African woman, in addition to living in poverty, lacking political representation, and other factors discussed earlier, also has to deal with. This manifests in the form of restrictive cultural and social practices, including the prevention of women from owning land, child marriages, prevention of women from inheriting property, among other things. For instance, Diop (2015: para. 5) found out that "in Malawi, for example, a recent study showed that plots managed by women are 25% less productive than plots managed by men".

This is not peculiar to Malawi. The United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres in 2020 said:

> But poverty in Africa, as in the rest of the world, still has a woman's face. For every 100 men aged between 25 and 34 living in extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, there are 127 women. Women are often concentrated in precarious jobs, and they carry a disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work. Violence against women remains pervasive (UN Secretary General, 2020: para 7)

In Africa, the challenges and situation are worse for women in female-headed households. In fact, ACOSS & UWSN (2020: para. 2) state that: "the poverty rate for households with a female reference person or main earner is almost twice as high as when the main earner is male". A closer concern in this research is the plight of women in rural areas.

Rural women do not enjoy a lot of benefits compared to their male counterparts, especially in Africa. Yet, they are the key to solving the problem of poverty, hunger, and underdevelopment. The International Labour Office (ILO 2012), writing about rural women, observed that they make up about 80% of workers in agriculture and agribusiness. Yet they receive only 10% of the credit offered to farmers, they receive only 7% of agricultural inputs and services, and they own less than 1% of agricultural land. ILO declares that if we empower rural women, we will largely eliminate poverty and end hunger.

UN Women (2023) is even more conclusive about their stand on rural women. They observe that:

> Rural women constitute one-fourth of the world's population, and in Africa, more than half of women live in rural areas. They play a critical role in the food systems in Africa. Rural women significantly contribute to Africa's agriculture and rural enterprises and fuel local and global economies (UN Women, 2023: para.2).

The realities of rural women are indeed stark. However, the misleading conclusion is always to think of them as a homogeneous group. They are generally categorised as poor. While this may be so, it is misleading to treat them as "a lumpen mass" as there are "categories of elite" even among the rural women and among the rural poor (Hossain, 2005). An analysis of intersectionality among rural women would show the complex diversities among them in terms of socio-economic status and access to opportunities and privileges.

Literature on advocacy around community radio strongly suggests its ability to cut through these many layers and reach those at the bottom of the ladder to amplify their voices and ignite their agency, not as listeners but as active content producers. This, it is hoped, would not only make them and their peculiar and often overlooked concerns visible but also provide an avenue for these concerns to make their way to the tables of policy actors (AMARC, 2007; Ojebode and Adegbola, 2007; Ojebode, 2019a; Gahungu, 2025).

While this position remains promising, this study noted that it may have been based on an oversimplified view of the complex diversities of the rural poor subgroup. It assumed, for instance, that the rural poor would be reachable, expressive, and willing to be part of community radio content production, where they would air their authentic concerns unfiltered by power, poverty, and illiteracy.

3.0 Methodology – interviews, focus group discussion.

The study purposively selected two of the first-generation community radio stations (*Kakaki FM* in Ondo State, and *Alare FM* in Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State), and two campus radio stations (*Diamond FM*, University of Ibadan, and *Crowther FM*, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo). Campus radio stations are equally considered community radio by the broadcasting regulatory body in Nigeria, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC). The selection of the stations was through purposive sampling because, in addition to having years of broadcasting experience, at the time of the study, they were also the only ones in Southwest Nigeria that had ongoing empowerment programmes focusing exclusively on women.

In each of the stations, the researchers interviewed the lead presenter or producer of the flagship women's programme, that is, a programme designed for women. The interview focused on a number of issues, the most relevant of which was women's participation in programme content.

Table 1: Discussants at FGDs per locality

S/N	Radio Station	Locality	No of Discussants
1	Kakaaki FM	Ondo	10
2	Alare FM	Ijebu Ode	12
3	Diamond FM	Ajibode (rural Ibadan)	12
4	Ajayi Crowther Radio	Oyo West	13
	Total		45

Source: Researcher field survey, 2024

In all, the researcher had four interviews with the women empowerment programme producers or presenters. This was followed by four FGDs that involved 45 women discussants. The FGDs were organised among women over a period of 6 months in each of the communities that the selected stations served. The sampling method for selecting the discussants was purposive: Care was taken to ensure that discussants were women living in the community, semiliterate or non-literate, and, from the researchers' judgement, of low socio-economic status. The study privileged roadside traders, women subsistence farmers, and small stall owners, among others. The decision to zoom in on these women is intended to avoid the tendency to exclude them in studies and discussions about rural communities. The FGD was in response to the interviews, shedding light on women's reluctance to be involved in programme making. Discussions took place in the evenings. This was the preference of the discussants because they were farmers, traders, and others who had to be at work or in their shops during the morning and afternoon hours. Discussants were incentivised with a refund of their transportation fare to the discussion venues and provision of refreshments, which some of them took home.

For informed consent, at the start of each discussion, discussants were fully briefed about the purpose of the discussion and how much time it would take. They were also informed that if they felt uncomfortable at any point in the discussion, they were free to leave the discussion without having to forfeit the incentives.

An integrated thematic analysis of both sets of data showed the stations' effort to draw in women. It also revealed the reluctance of certain categories of women to participate voluntarily in community radio programmes for females. The

data analysis for the interviews and FGDs was done using a coding guide that was created by lifting themes from the research questions that guided the study.

4.0 Findings

The study showed that producers and presenters in the selected community radio made an effort to reach out to women and get them involved in programme production in line with the participatory calling of community radio. However, they experienced difficulty in reaching beyond the layer of educated or slightly well-off women into the poor and nonliterate majority in the communities.

I. Efforts made to promote women's participation in programme production

One of the features of an ideal community radio is its ownership by the community, management by a team of community representatives, and staffing by community members who are known as volunteers. This is a crucial feature in Nigeria, where, for the first 60 years of its existence, radio was the voice of government. Thus, radio remained distant and alien to the people and condescending in its contents. Even after 60 years, radio was seen either as the voice of the government or a tool in the hands of private entrepreneurs.

From the contributions during the focus group discussions, the image of community radio as an external voice has almost completely changed to that of a voice belonging to the community. Expressions such as *radio wa yen* (that radio of ours) were notably recurrent in the contents of the discussion and were used to separate community radio from government and commercial radio stations. Our analysis showed that the community radio stations accomplished this transformation through four means.

The first was the ***use of the language and dialect*** of the community they served. Simple as this may be, it cut the image of a radio that was near and dear, and inseparable from the community that owns it. A discussant explained thus:

> When they first started that station, we thought it was another private radio station or another government radio station. But they said this is your radio, oh. It speaks our language. It speaks our dialect. So, we know it is our radio' [Female listener, Kakaki FM, Ondo]

Another discussant said:

> The radio station came to my attention because it broadcast in the indigenous Ijebu language. I also learnt to place value on our culture from the radio. This is our radio. We are proudly Ijebu [Female listener, Alare FM, Ijebu-Ode]

When listeners initially encountered the community radio station, they approached it with scepticism born from prior experiences of media that did not reflect their realities and were foreign to their aspirations. The community radio stations' deliberate positioning as "your radio" challenged assumptions about ownership and control in broadcasting. By emphasizing shared linguistic and cultural markers, the stations cultivated an

immediate sense of belonging among their audience.

Not only this, but the discussants also reinforced the fact that language functions not only as a means of communication but as a symbol of collective identity. In monolingual societies, dialects often carry social and regional significance that standard or official languages may obscure. By broadcasting in the community's peculiar dialects, the stations tapped into deep reservoirs of cultural resonance, transforming listeners from passive consumers into engaged co-owners of the programming.

The second pathway to a transformed image was that the radio stations concerned themselves with the ***problems and issues that bothered the communities***. Examples given included local market days, flooding of a rather small culvert in a small corner of the town, donated books not going round everyone in schools, extortion of market women and motorcycle taxi riders by local touts, the new arrival of vaccines in the local clinic, and an unidentified, strange-looking bulldozer left by the roadside for months. These issues were too unimportant to be covered by mainstream broadcast stations, which operate at national, regional/state levels, and were certainly of too little financial attraction to be covered by private/commercial stations. The community radio stations realised that covering them was their duty. A discussant said of Alare FM:

> They always discuss the issues that are disturbing us or are concerning us. For instance, the problem of levy from the local government. In our markets, the government would collect its own, and touts would collect their own. The people of the radio station started to discuss it until our leaders attended to it. Any problem we have, they always try to discuss it.

This quote highlights the essence of participatory media: when a radio station actively engages with issues troubling its audience, it transforms into a communal platform. The mention of levies and touts underscores how local economic pressures intersect with daily life. By providing a forum for discussion, the station not only airs grievances but also catalyzes action from leaders. These dynamics foster a sense of ownership: listeners did not just tune in for instructions and information; they knew that they somehow shaped the agenda.

The third means by which the stations fostered communal ownership was ***going beyond broadcasting*** and practically responding to the needs of the communities and listeners. The stations organised training on petty business financing and other forms of empowerment seminars and talks.

> The station has many offline seminars and trainings that I have been a part of. They usually announce it on their radio so that people who want to be part of the training can join them on their station premises. Their seminar on cooking has made me a better cook [Female, Ondo, Kakaki FM listener]

But beyond in-situ and in-person seminars and workshops, the stations went into practical advocative interventions.

> On off-the-air help, when I gave birth to my babies and I couldn't pay, the station made arrangements for the hospital to discharge me [Female, Diamond FM listener, Ibadan]

When a community radio arises for its listeners in times of desperate need, it metaphorically takes on flesh and becomes a symbol of hope, social support and unforgettable friendship.

Finally, the community's sense of ownership was also enhanced by the fact that the ***staff and volunteers were drawn from the community***. They are the people that the community members knew and with whom they interacted every day. "From the security guards, gardeners and those who read the news … they are from here" said a discussant about Kakaki FM, Ondo.

When community radio stations are staffed by locals, they transcend the role of mere broadcasters to become integral social institutions. This embeddedness fosters a powerful sense of ownership, aligns programming with lived realities, and strengthens civic bonds. It ensures familiarity, accountability and cultural alignment.

These findings are consistent with some of the existing studies and positions on community radio. Oyedele and Adegbola (2013) strongly suggest that if radio is properly 'demystified', it would ignite a strong sense of ownership among the different categories of community members. In the same vein, Ojebode and Akingbulu (2012) showed how the Baruten community members in Benin and Nigeria demonstrated their ownership in their community radio through massive financial and other forms of support.

II. Reluctance to participate

In spite of the great sense of ownership fostered by the community radio stations, the women listeners were reluctant to be part of the content production. The producers complained that the poor and non-literate women were especially reluctant to honour studio invitations and they had to rely on the same set of literate and well-off community members and professionals. For instance, the producer-presenter of two women-focused programs in Alare FM, said:

> Part of the challenges I face is the reluctance of the market people to be involved in the programme production. For some, it is political, they don't want to offend their political affiliates while others are just reluctant. Some want to be paid to be part of the programmes; funding can be an issue.

All the other presenters or producers made similar observations. Our study took this complaint to the Focus Group Discussions where the women not only confirmed it but also explained the reasons for their reluctance. These came to three fears: fear of making offensive statements; fear of losing sales while away from their shops; and fear of the radio technology.

III. Reasons for reluctance

"What if I say something offensive … Eyin l'ohun"

Community radio remains critical of the people in power, their policies and actions. Even though Nigeria regulation prevents community radio from covering political issues or discussing partisan politics, records show the stations do criticise government policies, and some of them have been sanctioned by the regulatory agencies for such actions which the agency described as breaches. Many of the rural poor, some of whom also benefit from occasional handouts from those in power, are reluctant to be found among those criticising the government, especially in small communities where it is easy to identify who said what on-air.

> When I was invited for the radio interview, I said I would not go. What if you say something now and it will be misinterpreted, as if you are abusing government. Police will come and arrest you for abusing government. All these powerful people. The word is an egg; if it drops, it cannot be picked up

This quote speaks to the uncertainty of freedom of speech in Nigeria. Discussants cited examples of those who had expressed critical and the government views and who had found themselves in trouble as a result of that. Some of those mentioned were those brutalised during the military regimes. However, although Nigeria became a democracy in 1999, freedom of expression has remained constantly a topic for heated debates. While attacks of free speech are more obvious in cases involving online and social media expressions, with government using the Cyber Crime laws, there is no guarantee that an ordinary person expressing critical views against local government officials would not be arrested.

'Eyin l'ohun' is a Yoruba expression that depicts the danger and punishments that comes with uttering expressions in unsafe environments or without prior careful consideration. It literally means "words are eggs" and cannot be picked up whole once they drop. That is, what is said cannot be unsaid. If the environment is safe, that would not matter.

When pressed further, discussants were unable to pinpoint an example of anyone in their community who had criticised government on the community radio station and had been picked up or punished. Yet the fear of persecution for ordering uncomplimentary statements on Radio was palpable among the discussants.

One might question the validity of this fear since discussants could not point to concrete examples within their communities. However, the fact that this came up repeatedly in the conversations suggested that the problems of free speech environment in Nigeria, which are often discussed at the national level, are also felt deeply at the rural community levels. In fact, it has been observed that the attention of human rights groups in Nigeria is often on the federal government while state governors and local government officials sometimes perpetrate worse human rights violations which often go unnoticed by the human rights community (Ojebode, 2019b)

In the prevailing socio-economic environment of Nigeria, especially given the high level of poverty, reluctance to utter offensive

expressions did not proceed from only the fear of being picked up and prosecuted or physically harmed. Worse than that, it is the fear that those offended might withdraw their favours from the offensive speaker. The crushing poverty level has made it expedient for the poor, especially rural women, to attach extreme significance to favours and patronage from the political elite, and from the ever-growing network of the elite's loyalists. Some of these loyalists are known to be brutal and unsparing in defending the image of their patrons and attacking their critics. A general atmosphere of unfreedom of expression can thus be felt in some local communities in Nigeria.

"What if customers come"

The second reason for not honouring invitations from community radio has to do with the unpredictable nature of small businesses and trades in Nigeria. Most of the rural non-literate women run small businesses and trades whose survival depends on an unsteady inflow of buyers. Sometimes, they go days without a buyer or customer. Temporarily closing down one's stall, stand or kiosk to go and participate in radio content production requires a careful cost-benefit analysis:

> Maybe that time you go to the radio station for a programme is when people will come to buy something from you. Sometimes, that is the only customer you will have that day. They come and they find your stall is closed. Think about it. You are losing customers bit by bit [Female discussant, Ajayi Crowther FM, Oyo].

This quote and the different variations of it which recurred in many ways in the FGDs depict the economic realities of the rural poor women as well as the structural barriers that limit their participation in public life in general.

These women are living on the edge of survival, and every customer counts. It is a situation which exemplifies their precarious livelihoods. Missing even one sale could mean not having enough for food, school fees, or basic needs. Their reluctance to honour the invitation from their radio was, therefore, not borne out of apathy or disinterest but out of survival.

In informal economies, reputation and consistency are very important. A closed shop, stall or kiosk signals unreliability. If customers come and find the stall closed, they might not return. The women listeners understand the opportunity cost very deeply.

Women farmers, food processors, porters, and others like them work all day, and seven days a week. Unlike others in the community, such as teachers and public servants, they had no free time to go into participating in radio content production.

Presenters and producers in community radio realized that when they take the radio to the people, their reluctance to speak diminished. This enhanced participation.

"What if I spoil something": technophobia

In its language, contents, staffing and interventions, community radio may have brought

broadcasting closer to the people and become their radio indeed. However, it is still a technology; it is housed in a purpose-built facility that is strange in some way. It seems the physical studio, with its soundproofing, partitions, mixers, and microphones, feels both alien and intimidating to rural nonliterate women. Despite its localised programming, the studio space can unintentionally signal "otherness" to those unaccustomed to any broadcast environment.

Not only this, discussants expressed fear of fragile equipment which might break if, as one discussant put it, a "bush person like me touches it".

> I heard it one day that the tools they use there are expensive. They bought them with lots of million. If a bush person like me goes and holds it like our own mortar and pestle, and it spoils. Am I not in trouble? Something that belongs to the entire community [Female listener, Kakaki FM, Ondo]

While this quote might have been meant to be humorous, it points to an important issue: radio and its equipment are still altogether a stranger to the rural and marginalised women. As real or imagined fragility elevates equipment to a sacred status, producers and presenters resort to recycling the same group of technophilic members of the community who also happen to be relatively well off and fairly well-educated. The likely outcome of this is radio content that reflects only the perspectives of a few and which risks further alienating the majority of the women.

While some of the findings here were unexpected and are rarely found in existing literature on community radio, traces of them already exist in the literature. In their study of the Baruten people who occupy a border-split community traversing Benin and Nigeria, Ojebode and Akingbulu (2012) found that community members were content with being listeners and would not want to be involved in content production.

Conclusion

As it is in most situations, there exists a gap between the ideal vision of community radio as an egalitarian platform and the practical dynamics that shape participation. While rural women embrace community radio as an accessible and relevant medium, their reluctance to co-produce content underscores economic, political, structural, and cultural constraints. Three fears emerged: offending influential local actors and jeopardizing essential support networks; sacrificing income due to time away from market stalls; and navigating unfamiliar broadcast technologies. These anxieties inhibit broad-based engagement, forcing programme producers to rely on a narrow circle of educated women. Consequently, community radio as a voice for marginalised groups remains partially unrealised. This study provides crucial direction for media practitioners seeking to amplify women's voices.

To bridge this participation gap, community radio stations must adopt targeted strategies. Workshops that demystify production tools, flexible scheduling that respects market obligations, and trust-building initiatives with

power holders can mitigate fears and foster collective ownership. Partnerships with local women's associations and microfinance outlets might transform the radio studio into a welcoming space for diverse voices.

Realizing the full democratizing potential of community radio will take more than an 'open microphone'. It hinges on confronting both technical and socio-political barriers that silence communities the medium aims to empower.

Recommendations: Towards a more inclusive community radio broadcasting

It is a sad irony that the very people whose voices are most needed —those women who are poor, non-literate, and marginalised—are the ones least able to participate in community radio content production. This situation challenges one of the key assumptions behind the long and arduous advocacy for community radio in Nigeria (Ojebode and Akingbulu, 2009), which was that community radio would be the voice of the voiceless and the space for the marginalised, thus allowing them to be actors in their own development. This, it was envisaged, would unlock their ability to contribute to national and other forms of development. It is not a long shot to imply that the government was finally convinced of this when it yielded to years of pressure and began granting radio licenses to communities in 2015 in Nigeria.

However, since the government approved the establishment of community radio in Nigeria, the efforts of the Nigeria Community Radio Coalition (NCRC) have understandably been directed towards supporting the growth and protection of licensed community radio stations through training of community radio volunteers and staff, as well as community radio managers. These commendable capacity development interventions have yielded important results, part of which must be the great sense of ownership among community members captured in this study.

This study suggests that NCRC needs to adopt a broader vision of its calling and vision beyond supporting the development of the community radio sector into nurturing the freedom of expression space in Nigeria. This, of course, has to be in collaboration with other actors in that space. The struggle to provide an expression space for the rural, marginalised and poor in their communities should not be seen to have accomplished its aim with the licensing, growth and thriving of community radio stations in Nigeria.

When the media are distant from the people in geography, ideology, and content, they cannot serve as the voice of the people. However, even when they are near and integrated, it still does not automatically mean they have become the voice of the people. Socio-economic, political, and other constraints –poverty, insecurity, illiteracy, precarious livelihoods – continue to create tangible obstacles to popular participation in content production by the people, especially those in the margins. The full impact of community radio will be felt only when these constraints are addressed by the government and other actors.

The study calls attention to the complicated nature of inequality and stratification. There is no point on the social ladder at which the

poor are homogeneous. Even among the so-called poor and marginalised, there are layers of privilege, power, and authority. In development discourses, narratives around the poor are wont to tar them with a broad brush of homogeneity. Penning poverty line to surviving on about one US dollar per day is helpful; what is erroneous is treating those in that bracket as one.

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