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## **The Development of Community Media in English-speaking West Africa**

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A number of developments in the West Africa region provide a favourable context for rethinking the role of community media in development. In the last decade, the mass media landscape has undergone radical changes. There is the growth in the number of independent private media and the extension into the region of new communications and information technologies. But the most significant is that the region has experienced political developments and social commotions which are, on the one hand, of extraordinarily destructive proportions, and, on the other, of significant inclinations towards democracy. These political and social developments have raised critical issues concerning human rights, democratic institutions and culture. Above all, they have raised questions of the integration of different ethnic communities in post-colonial societies.

In these developments, there is a stark absence of communities participating, in autonomous ways, in the processes of seeking change. The popular voices from the communities in the democratic transition process are at best mute. Processes of resolving major conflicts drown out popular voices and smother independent community initiatives. What is more, the radical changes in the mass media landscape do not seem to have engendered corresponding initiatives from communities of the poor, the marginalised, unempowered and isolated. In

other words, the mass media, despite tremendous progress, tend to be inherently limited as alternative voices for the people.

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### **What is Community?**

The concept of community in communications discourse has tended to be a construct of spatial or social parameters, or both. In the first case, community refers to a specific geographical territory of or within or under a particular political entity. This may be defined as such to include a population under a particular political administration, traditional or otherwise, but certainly constituting only a small portion of the whole of the jurisdiction of the state of a country. The spatial definition is often interchanged with the expression 'local'.

The social conception sees community in terms of "shared interests, tastes and values," and even in "demographic or psychographic terms"<sup>1</sup>. This would mean that groups of people who identify themselves with particular social, economic, cultural or political-ideological interests, views and orientations, might constitute a community. They may or may not all reside in a particular geographical area such as a city, a county, or a district under a common political administrative jurisdiction. In this case, the members of the community so defined could be found in different spatial locations, contiguous to each other or not.

Developments in public and 'local' radio systems indicate that definitions of community in mass communication discourse are not static. They seem to be influenced more by the purposes, or specifically the character, of the audiences for whom the media are intended. It could be a community of people residing in a particular geographic locality, or a population sharing a particular social, economic, cultural or political interest, vision or aspiration. AMARC (the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters), with members on five continents, put a stamp of acceptability to this dual character of community and endorsed the definition that the term could mean "a geographically based group of persons and/or a social group or sector of the public who have common or specific interests."<sup>2</sup>

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## What are Community Media?

In the 1970s and 1980s, disenchantment with the authoritarian centralised state-owned and controlled media in Africa encouraged experiments with new forms of media that would address the needs and interests, particularly of rural communities. This was also motivated by a strong desire to use mass media in promoting the socio-economic development of the rural population in the face of intensifying poverty. Many projects for rural-based mass media were experimented with. The state-owned broadcasting systems ventured into setting up radio transmission services for particular geographical localities.

The new perspective on mass media development necessarily elicited definitions of community and community media. Some of these confounded rural and community, or treated them as synonymous to each other. For example, Kasoma argues that:

A rural/community newspaper is a regular publication which carries news stories, features, editorials, illustrations and/or pictures as well as advertisements for rural people. It is put together and published by rural folk in their own place.... To qualify as a rural/community newspaper, therefore, a publication should not only be published in rural areas but should also be compiled and published by villagers themselves.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of participation in Kasoma's conceptualisation was promoted in discussions on community media which were integral to the media deregulation accompanying the movements for political liberalisation and democratisation in the late 1980s and 1990s. In South Africa, the demand for popular participation in media ownership and production took considerable place in the debates to reorganise and reshape mass media in a post-apartheid democratic construction. There, the idea of community media, particularly radio, received some of the more substantial attempts at conceptualisation on the continent. The Jabulani! Freedom of the Airwaves Conference in the Netherlands to discuss democratisation of broadcasting gave a formal declaration that "Community or Participatory Broadcasting is initiated and controlled by members of a community of interest, or a geographical community, to express their concerns, needs and aspirations without outside interference."<sup>4</sup>

Here again 'community' recalls audience and geographical space. Further, it also stresses the participation of its members in almost all aspects of the process of

mass communication: from ownership and establishment of the means of communication to management and production. Others would also equate this system with the concept of 'alternative' media. Masilela for example sees no distinction between alternative media and community media. According to him:

Alternative media are distinguished by their ownership and management structures, their financing, their regulation, their programming and their policy stances on issues of access and participation. In terms of their ownership and management, alternative media are community-owned and managed through duly elected representatives or direct and voluntary community participation. In terms of their programming, alternative media carry community-oriented programming produced by community members for community members. In terms of their policy stances on issues of access and participation, alternative media are highly responsive to highly targeted audiences and use interactive methods as much as possible<sup>5</sup>.

The tendency to associate community media or radio with the poor, the politically and socially marginalised or powerless in society, the so-called 'voiceless', those who traditionally have little access to media in terms of ownership, use and expression, as it is posited above, receives endorsement by AMARC:

rural radio, co-operative radio, participatory radio, free radio, alternative radio, popular radio, educational radio ... in isolated rural villages and in the heart of the largest cities in the world [are all the same. They are] the voice of the poor and voiceless, landless peasants, urban shack dwellers, impoverished indigenous nations, trade unions, etc. and also a tool of development.<sup>6</sup>

In West Africa, there has been no significant or noteworthy discourse addressing the concept of community media. Quite remarkably, with the exception of AMARC's 1995 conference in Dakar, the major international conferences in the region held to deliberate on the new broadcast pluralism or deregulation have not paid much attention to the issue.<sup>7</sup> They seem to have been concerned more with the larger political questions of deregulation than with the forms of pluralistic media. More attention has been paid to local or rural radio broadcasting which were attempts at improving rural people's access to and participation in broadcasting in previous decades.

The absence of a clear-cut universal definition provides room for flexibility and innovativeness. However, that may also be a cause for arbitrary notions, particularly for regulatory purposes by the state. A critical look at the seeming confusion

points to common attributes which can inform an attempt at developing a guide for assessing actual community media as they exist, or for promoting the concept in the region. The criteria proposed below are used to guide assessment of the existence and development of media that serve purposes other than, different from, sometimes complementary to, or even contrary to the services and objects of mainstream media.

Different experiences, however, recognise certain key characteristics as central to the existence of community media. Among these, the principal attribute that sets community media off from other forms is their social and political agenda. They present an alternative discourse from the communication agenda set by the dominant, socio-political or even cultural order. And they contribute to the processes of change and promote progress in the lives of poor, marginalised, deprived and or oppressed communities.

For present purposes, 'community media' are defined as those that are devoted to the social, political and cultural interests and aspirations of identifiable groups resident in particular geographical areas within a country or within its provinces; and/or sharing common specific social, economic, cultural or political experiences and interests. This community, however, refers to those that are: geographically physically remote from centres of governmental and economic decision-making and development; economically deprived or poor; culturally marginalised or alienated from dominant cultures; socially subordinated and or discriminated against or persecuted; or politically victimised or disempowered. Community media in West Africa must conform to the demands defined by Asian and South African models in terms of access by the community to the content and social agenda of those media. Of necessity they must also be based and operated in the communities they purport to serve or belong to.

Ownership systems, however, may vary, contrary to the strict prescriptions of AMARC, South African and other advocates. They may be privately owned by an individual entrepreneur, a group, an association or an institution. What is important is that the ownership is non-sectarian, non-partisan and open. It must be independent of political authority, established economic interests or in programme orientation and editorial direction. Above all, the *raison d'être* for establishing the medium must not be commercial.

There are numerous communities which cannot find the financial and human resources to initiate and sustain media such as radio, newspapers or video. However, the answer may come from individuals, non-governmental organisations, or religious establishments committed to socio-economic development, or to human rights progress. Notwithstanding the ownership type, community interests and concerns can be guaranteed if management control involves considerable community participation. Mechanisms ensuring accountability to the community strengthen popular involvement.

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### **Existing Community Media in West Africa**

Of the media adopted or used by communities for their own communication needs, the traditional forms of music, dance and drama predominate. They are also mostly informal. That is, they are forms set up almost spontaneously and without formal structures, agendas or programmes for functioning. Their quality, in terms of artistic expression, message development, and professional capacity has changed little over time. Mass media forms such as radio, television and print are weak and largely untried in the region. There have, however, been significant developments in radio broadcasting, though even here, the region lags far behind the levels of development in South Africa and other regions outside Africa, as can be seen from the following.

In the Gambia, there are two community stations, at Sapu and Kerewan. However, Sapu is a station of the state-owned Gambia Radio and Television, while Kerewan operates under the provincial administration of the area. Plans by the country's National Women's Council to set up women's community stations in Brikama and another town have remained on the drawing board since 1996.

In Liberia, the only service approximating a community broadcasting system is the Talking Drums Studio of the Search for Common Ground organisation. The studio, in Monrovia, produces programmes to promote peace and development. It also has a project for using drama for community mobilisation and education.

The Dagbon Centre for General Learning (Dagbon Ninneesim Karimzong) is a community education and development programme in the Northern Region of Ghana, with a studio where radio programmes are produced for transmission on the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation's regional station at nearby Tamale. The radio pro-

grammes are produced by and for the communities on development issues. The Centre plans to have its own transmitters to get into full-scale broadcasting in the community.

The Ghana Broadcasting Corporation has a number of rural-based stations providing limited services of community orientation. There is no local representation in their management structures and most transmission time carries services from Accra, the national capital. In the strict sense of community service, there are only two other radio stations. The first and older one is Radio Ada, a non-partisan, non-sectarian and non-commercial station for development. It is located in Ada, some two hours east of Accra. The second is the Winneba Community Radio which started transmission in 1999. This station is also non-commercial and is development-oriented. Both stations were initiated by the efforts and resources of individuals. They broadcast in the local languages and depend mostly on volunteer staff from the community for programme production and management. The stations were established with assistance, in the form of equipment and facilities, from some intergovernmental agencies and donor organisations. There is also Radio Universe, a University of Ghana station, owned by the students and the university and with programming by and for that community.

In Sierra Leone, over a decade of political crises and outright war has destroyed the broadcasting infrastructure. The national Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service network is but a shell. For the past three years, independent privately owned stations operated with varying attitudes to the factions in the war. In the crisis and confusion, one station, SKYY FM, based in Bo, a provincial town in the interior of the country, has remained the only medium of service to the community, providing news, information and messages of peace and development. Though starting off as a commercial station, the exigencies of war and economic gloom have imposed demands on the station to serve as an institution for community solidarity and dialogue. Another station, Radio Mankneh, at Makeni, was set up by the Wesleyan Mission in the late 1980s. Though starting off as a religious station, it was soon involved in the debates about democratisation in the early 1990s. In 1994, it fell into the hands of the rebel Revolutionary United Forces (RUF). It was closed down when the rebels were routed, but it is said to have been reopened after rebels retook Makeni a year ago. Its signals do not go beyond 16 kms.

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### **Problems and Challenges**

The main challenges confronting existing community media, and efforts to initiate new projects, include the traditional problems of funding, running costs, management, human resources, and the social environments of the communities. Other issues have to do with the legal and policy regimes of the countries concerned. These affect the functioning of media and communication and have a bearing on the establishment and operation of community media as well.

One of the difficult social questions that obstruct community media is illiteracy. The consequences of this are that print media development is hindered and human resources for producing media messages and adding to creative productions are severely limited. Illiteracy also hampers versatility in the use of new communication technologies by members of communities.

In some countries, the political conditions may pose difficulties for community media operating as independent entities. The Gambia's policy outline, for instance, provides a basis for state intervention. Moreover, political traditions of control are a potential source of interference in the work of community media by local authorities such as chiefs or representatives of the central state.

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### **The Case for Community Media in West Africa**

The place of media (mainstream or otherwise) in society and their role in history are circumscribed and defined by the contemporary situation they find themselves in. Current social and political conditions in the region consist, in the best circumstances, of different levels of transition to democratic governance and, at the other extreme, of war and serious threats of disintegration. Questions of political stability, peace, democratic rule, human rights and constructive participation are paramount issues for the population. Questions of human security in all its facets, of improving economic circumstances, of reducing poverty, and of restoring human dignity, confront societies in the countries of the region. This makes it useful to recall Masilela's demands for assessing the role of alternative or community media in political change in Africa.

According to him, the cultural project of alternative (which he equates with community) media must promote enlightenment, learning, creativity and a critical

spirit. It must support and sustain community-based, independent organisations and social movements. The language, symbolism and representations must be that of the least privileged or oppressed people so as to engage them in a permanent dialogue for change. It must promote self-image which enhances positive esteem and build self confidence and faith in the communities' abilities to take initiatives in changing their circumstances.<sup>8</sup>

The demand for, or importance of, community media arises from several considerations. The first is that existing media are either not responsive enough to the needs of the communities, or that the latter consider themselves totally or significantly marginalised from the media. The second is that the community making the demand has its own messages to voice to itself and the larger world, but that existing media cannot or are not disposed to accommodate this different voice.

In English-speaking West Africa, considerations ranging from the political, geographical, developmental, linguistic to cultural, continue to keep the issue alive and urgent. The traditional and dominant state-owned or controlled media are well known for their inadequacies in meeting the needs and demands of marginalised sectors of society. They are known as well for their lack of openness to independent and unofficial viewpoints and ideas. Their role as instruments for smothering a democratic culture of ideas and cultural expression needs no further comment.

However, the new wave of independent media provides more potential than actual answers to the challenges. In one important reality, rural communities and the social economic issues are barely served and addressed by the otherwise vibrant and politically courageous newspaper and radio industries. The capitals of the countries and a few provincial centres monopolise the new privately owned radio stations and newspapers. Nigeria, which more than the other countries has potential for private media in many more towns, is lagging behind in that sense due principally to restrictions on opening up the airwaves for more voices.

Traditionally, print media pursuing community interests and objectives have been poorly developed in the region. Commercial enterprises publishing for geographical communities in indigenous languages have survived for only short periods.<sup>9</sup> Newspapers, set up as literature for adult literacy programmes, have survived for only the term of the often externally supported projects.<sup>10</sup> The latter fate has necessarily befallen those established for experimental or research projects. Of all

the media, radio provides the stronger potential for community use. But the limitations of the independent stations for community access are highlighted by the widespread neglect of local languages.<sup>11</sup>

The case for promoting community media in the region needs to be made along the following broad considerations.

1. *Peace-building and development*: The countries are going through, have come out of, or harbour potential sources of violent, disintegrative conflicts. Concerted and consistent education by mass media in peace, human rights, democratic governance and tolerance is very much needed. Post-conflict reconstruction also requires strong media close to and accessible to local communities.
2. *Socio-economic development*: The persistence and indeed intensification of poverty and deprivation calls for renewed interest in the use of media to support development. Its use for creating general awareness, imparting skills and new technology utilisation is an objective that community media ought to pursue to support local initiatives and efforts. Potentially viable small enterprises and other initiatives flounder because of poor management. Community media can address these through direct educational programming.
3. *Literacy and numeracy*: This is an area that governments have spent considerable energy and finances on since independence. Both print media and radio have been mobilised to promote these objectives. Whatever the results, declining rates of literacy require that communities find opportunities to address the problem. Mass media in the communities must support or initiate such efforts.
4. *Urban social questions*: The last two decades have seen tremendous expansion in urban populations in the region. The cities have expanded through massive rural out-migrations driven by economic factors and civil strife. There has been no corresponding socio-economic development, which has resulted in large numbers of unemployed youths and social problems of all sorts have been aggravated. Crime, prostitution, homelessness, and conflicts have increased. Thus the cities also need community media for urban youths which could address the issues of jobs and projects such as co-operative ventures to build on the creative initiatives of the youths themselves. Such media

would provide counselling in health, teenage parenting and social relations. They would address issues of solidarity and mutual help, and respond to some of the challenges arising from increasing atomisation and alienation in rapidly growing cities.

5. *Culture and development*: The cultural dimensions of freedom in Africa are enormous. Central to this question is language. The English-speaking countries of West Africa exemplify the African problem of using a foreign language for governance, mass media communication and the education of its young. The people use their own languages in everyday life. But the laws, constitutions and institutions of daily governance are all in a foreign language. An essential characteristic of community media is that they communicate in the people's own languages. Community media are critical in responding to the language question for the reason that much of indigenous wisdom, knowledge, philosophy and science, being unwritten, is embedded in the language of the people. Development of the languages could open up a new treasure of science and technology. The second important reason is that community media can assist in introducing minority, remote or marginalised languages into the public domain. They can assist in their development and growth which enhance the dignity and self-confidence of the speakers.
6. *Cultural creativity*: Because the creative activities of the people in music, poetry and the arts are in their languages, much of these remain unrecorded. Media actually reproducing the people's creations and experiences would halt the slow death of their cultural heritage.
7. *Democracy and good governance*: The one guarantee for political stability and democratic governance is the involvement of popular social classes in the democratic processes beyond the formal periodic rites of voting. Long-term and systematic education in the principles and values of democratic culture, and the consistent involvement of the people in enforcing accountability, and in discussions of public affairs also help in strengthening democracy and good governance. One condition of this is media that are accountable and responsive to popular sentiments. It requires media that constantly provide voices for the community to question the prevailing assumptions of the voice of authority.

The rationale for community media is also that they create conditions for marginalised communities to have their own voices. They enhance the opportunities for the wider enjoyment of freedom of expression. Community media enrich and make real the realisation of media pluralism. The dominant neo-liberal ideology proposes that media under 'free enterprise' promote a 'free market place of ideas'. This is strongly disputed. Louw, for instance, argues that

a commercially oriented medium means market censorship. It means a medium de-facto 'controlled' by advertisers, and the middle class interests to which they pander. Advertisers are interested in those with disposable income; and that means the middle class. And if advertisers are interested in the middle class, then it is this middle class that editors of the commercially driven media must attract if they are to survive.<sup>12</sup>

This is the potential threat to most mass organizations media in West Africa today, since they are commercial. This limitation could be rectified by a proliferation of community media.

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### **The Kinds of Community Media to Promote**

Promotion of different kinds of community media depends on the particular circumstances of the different communities. These are examined below.

1. *Radio*: The freeing of the airwaves makes access to radio a strong reality. Radio has enormous advantages for community use. The technology offers wide choices to suit different spatial requirements for transmission. Current technology is conducive to participatory programme production and/or presentation. It affords easy collection, recording and playback of events and issues. Radio can also cover several villages or scattered communities at no extra cost. The low literacy rates also make it still the most efficient and accessible mass medium.
2. *Newspapers, magazines*: The generally high illiteracy rate, especially in rural and poor communities, makes print media an ambiguous proposition. Literacy rates are even lower in indigenous languages. However, experience shows that they can be used effectively for mobilisation for development, through organised reading clubs and meetings. Their use encourages interest in literacy among the non-literate. With the absence of reading material, community print

- materials offer the literate a resource for improving their reading skills. For print media to be most relevant, they must be published in the local languages.
3. *Video*: Video as a medium for communities has severe limitations. Without broadcasting and production on television through transmitters that reach larger audiences, video is usually limited to small groups at a time. This means that many units would be required to meet the needs of many communities, or even groups in individual communities at a higher cost. The main consumable, the tapes, is also costly. Maintenance also makes extraneous demands. However, being audio-visual, video has qualities of effectiveness in imparting knowledge and skills that other media do not have. It facilitates recording current events and group activities for recall better than do others, and it is thus a medium with greater potential for credibility for non-literate people. Video is recommended strongly to support training, educational and development programmes.
  4. *Audio tapes*: Using audio tapes for community projects has the potential for reaching audiences as groups or as individuals. Their use for group listening, feedback and production is the preferred approach. This creates an atmosphere for dialogue, discussion, and the promotion of understanding and a culture of healthy debate. Audio tapes can be an effective facility for education in a range of issues from health, agriculture, voter or elections awareness to community management. This medium, however, raises some issues pertaining to production and resources. As the community's needs increase, production on a corresponding scale would require appropriate facilities, e.g. a studio with more sophisticated equipment.
  5. *Music, drama, and puppets*: Most villages in the region have informal or formal groups of performing artists. Religious groups such as churches have choirs and some schools have drama clubs. Drama groups performing professionally from village to village exist in many districts as well. What are not so widely organised are puppeteers. These forms of media can be popular and facilitate educational programmes of awareness raising, influence behaviour formation and contribute to perception change. But they are most beneficial as complementary or supplementary elements. Though live performances are limited to one audience at a time, they are effective and

encourage interpersonal encounters and participation. These forms also unearth creative talents. But they can become more widely accessible if performances are produced and broadcast through other media such as radio, video and audio tapes.

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### **Types of Policies**

Official appreciation of community media as systems which are independent of mainstream media is poor in the region. Rural broadcasting, which featured very prominently in development thinking, was an extension of state media activities. Print media approximating community systems were for the most part official projects in adult literacy support programmes. Development of media by independent community bodies or initiatives has also been slow and not of widespread currency. The result of all these is that, in the region, the discourse on media pluralism, freedom of the airwaves, and media freedom has hardly raised the question of community media and the respective policy frameworks.

Of the five countries, only Sierra Leone does not have a national communications policy. All the rest have produced drafts, though none have so far legislated the final national guiding policy for communications, media and so on. Liberia's draft makes no reference to community media.

Gambia's National Communication and Information Policy (NACIP), 1999-2008, drafted in August 1998, has three classes of radio broadcasting, which include Community, Private and State-owned Radio stations. The two paragraphs defining policy for community stations propose that: "to ensure that they do not lose their character and focus, government intends to license them as non-profit community service entities" and they are to be "governed by a strict code of practice on programme content, advertising and sponsorship."<sup>13</sup>

No other community media are so clearly defined. However, an inference may be made from the one paragraph reference to Information, Education and Communication (IEC) of a gesture toward some forms of community media development. The document states: "Given the need to promote traditional communication methods, the government will continue to encourage the effective use of IEC - as a strategy for the achievement of social sector development

objectives. In this connection, the policy will encourage the standardisation and harmonisation of IEC materials.”<sup>14</sup>

Ghana’s National Communications Policy, drafted after a national conference in October 1998, is before the cabinet for presentation to Parliament. This document makes explicit reference only to community radio stations. It is also conceived as a non-commercial system. However, there is a proposal for tax concessions and other incentives from the state to minimise the costs of establishment and operation. The Ghana proposal also refers to flexibility in the definition of ownership of community stations, allowing for a variety, provided that they remain non-commercial.

The need for clear policies on community media is obvious. It is also important that the clarity includes media other than radio for community participation and initiatives.

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### **Training and Research**

The research needs are considerable. To begin with, a survey of existing media in the countries is required which should attempt to establish data on the following: the technical facilities - the current state and shortcomings; the human resource capacity for production, operation and management; the economics of establishment, operation and sustainability; and the training needs. This should be related to a review of past projects and the experiences, a content analysis of existing and/or past media to indicate future directions, establishment of data on institutions and expertise that can provide training in all fields – technical, managerial and journalistic in communication skills and knowledge, and assessment of all facilities in the country that could support establishment of some of the media or production projects.

A separate study of literacy in the local languages is needed to: define the limits of print media use; to establish the human resource capacity for production (editorial work); to project realistic circulation possibilities; and to assess possibilities of community role in production. And a study is called for of the real and potential sources of material and financial support for the different media in the different countries. There should also be periodic surveys and assessments of audience/community attitudes and perceptions.

The following broad areas may require training: communication knowledge and skills as well as journalistic techniques; technical production methods and techniques; management practices; and operational and maintenance skills for equipment and facilities. Training programmes need to be planned to embrace: training a cadre of trainers to handle personnel at the basic levels; specific issue-based training; seminars on policy, legal, and other issues pertaining to new ideas, new trends, and questions of general concern.

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### Recommendations

The following recommendations address the general issues in the region:

1. *National policies*: The importance of community media as distinct institutions for development, free speech and expression, as well as cultural expression should be recognised and defined as such in national communications policies.
2. *Regulatory and legal frameworks*: Community media should enjoy unencumbered conditions for their establishment and operation. Laws and regulations which condition establishment of media on property or financial guarantees must be reformed or exempt community media.
3. *Financial/Material incentives*: Taxes on equipment and material designated for use by community media should attract rebates, reduction or waivers.
4. *Subsidies*: State support, or support from public resources, should be provided to such media, particularly those set up in economically depressed, remote or isolated districts. Such support may come in the form of salaries for specialist personnel coming from outside the areas; sponsorship of training; donation of equipment; provision of technical support such as engineering services; or exemptions from payment of copyright fees.
5. *National level support*: National media networks such as the state broadcasting services, should offer support in the form of studio facilities for production of certain programmes for community radio stations or audiotapes.
6. *Urban poor*: NGOs for development and human rights operating or based in the big cities should be encouraged to establish media for marginalised urban social groups. Those that can set up radio stations should be encour-

aged to collaborate. Different social groups can share frequencies to minimise the costs of replicating stations.

7. *Collaboration*: Groups of community media operators should be encouraged to collaborate in the production of material and programmes (e.g. news for radio or print) of common interest and use. They should also share news, information and other material.
8. *Endowment Fund*: In particular countries, or regions, consideration may be given to establishing a common endowment fund (with contributions from donor sources, inter-governmental agencies, private supporters with tax exemptions) to assist community media that are in difficulty.
9. *Associations*: Community media owners and operators should be encouraged to form associations for mutual benefit and to promote their interests.
10. *Exchange of information*: Community media from different countries in the region may come together periodically to exchange information and experiences, and promote their common interests.

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## Conclusion

Despite the violent conflict situation in parts of the region such as Sierra Leone, there seems also to be a strong tendency towards peace and democratic reform. Because of the conditions of crisis, the processes of transition and the needs of development, community media are a pressing and critical need. These media should be promoted as instruments for strengthening popular participation in democratisation, cultural self-assertion and creative expression. To do this, communications policies and legislation affecting media and expression need to provide enabling conditions for their development, with policies to encourage communities to take initiatives.

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## Notes

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2. AMARC Africa and Panos Southern Africa. (1998). *What is Community Radio? A Resource Guide*, p.14.
3. Kasoma, P. Francis, 'The Rural/Community Press in Africa. Let the People Speak.' A paper presented at the *Pan African Symposium on Christian Communication*, Harare, Zimbabwe, 22-31 July, 1987. p. 2.

4. African European Institute, *Jabulani! Freedom of the Airwaves*. Amsterdam, 1991, p. 72
5. Masilela, S. B. Temba, 'Alternative Media and Political Change in Africa.' A paper prepared for the ACCE Pre-Biennial Conference on *Rethinking Development: the Legacy of Paulo Freire*, (16-17 October, 1994), Accra, Ghana.
6. AMARC, *op.cit.* p.14
7. These conferences include: the *International Conference on Radio Pluralism in Bamako*, 1993; AFRICAST, *International Conference on Deregulation of Broadcasting in Africa*, Abuja, Nigeria, 1996; and the *First Conference of the West African Independent Broadcasters Association*, Banjul, the Gambia, 1996.
8. Masilela, S. B. Temba, *op.cit.*
9. In the five countries only Nigeria has had significant development of commercial newspapers published in local languages in recent years. In the 1980s, the newspaper industry of the late Mashood Abiola included titles in Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba for communities in the respective regions of the languages. By the mid-1990s most of these had folded.
10. An example is the *Wonsuom*, a newspaper project initiated by the School of Communication Studies of the University of Ghana with UNESCO support. It was published in Fanti, a Ghanaian language, with editorial staff from the community. It developed reading clubs who also made contributions into editions of the monthly. The paper was used as a medium to support community initiated development programmes. It lasted from 1983 to 1994.
11. A recent study of independent radio in five cities in the region - Accra, Bamako, Banjul, Cotonou and Monrovia - shows that: no station broadcasts exclusively in a local language; that only a few broadcast some news and public affairs in local languages. See Kwame Karikari, 'Media, Culture and Development: Independent Radio and Language in West Africa.' A paper presented at the symposium, *World Archaeological Congress*, Cape Town, January 1999.
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13. Department of State for Works, Communications and Information. *National Communications and Information Policy (NACIP)*, August 1998, p. 30.
14. *ibid.*, p. 31.