The Broadcasting Services Act (2001): An instrument for the development of community broadcasting in Zimbabwe?

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Abstract

At its invention radio was not taken seriously and many governments were reluctant to finance its development. However the scenario changed when the potential of radio was realised and governments began to regulate it. Zimbabwe does not comply with the African Charter on Broadcasting as it does not have Community radio. The study analyses the Act and carries out institutional analysis of CRIs. The study established that community radio initiatives in Zimbabwe are not licenced but are registered with the Ministry of Media, Information and Broadcasting Services. The country has over twenty CRIs and these are based in both urban and rural areas and their funding mainly comes from donors while most personnel at the stations are volunteers. The most vibrant of these CRIs operate in the capital city Harare and Bulawayo. Lack of licencing resulted in them broadcasting through the internet, messages over mobile phones as well as recording, distribution and playing radio programmes using compact discs. Since this is not real transmission some audiences do not get immediate information as in 'real' radio. There is need for the government to licence community broadcasters so that Zimbabweans have access to alternative radio.

Key words: community, community radio, community broadcasting, licencing, Community Radio Initiatives

Introduction

Due to its many favourable attributes radio is a very powerful medium in Africa. On the other hand, television is more popular in developed countries where even community television stations can be found. Radio broadcasting is a very crucial constituent in human development as it can enhance socio-economic welfare of a society. At its invention radio was a past time medium that was not taken seriously but when governments saw its potential they then started regulating it (Baran, 2000, Scannel, 2007). Initially statutory regulation was used as measure to allocate and control the frequencies. When radio came to Africa during the colonial era, the African governments also regulated its operations. This paper interrogates how radio regulation is affecting the development of community radio in Zimbabwe.

An ideal broadcasting system comprises the public service, commercial and community broadcasting and these are supposed to complement each other in disseminating information. The African Charter on Broadcasting stipulates the implementation of the three tier system because of its democratic inclusiveness and it also discourages state interference in the broadcasting system. Furthermore, the Windoek Declaration, advocates for plurality and diversity in the media and in broadcasting the inclusion of community radio can boost both multiplicity and miscellany.

Community broadcasting is very pivotal in human development as it enhances community participation. Chignell, (2009:118) describes community radio which "...places a priority on providing for the social and cultural needs of a defined community, usually in opposition to mainstream media." Community radio is designed to meet the needs of specific communities and these communities vary.

There could be ethnic communities living in the same geographical area or they could be living in different areas. There can also be communities who have common interests such as religion, sport, business and others. Community radio stations are not supposed to operate as a business and whatever revenue that is sought from community advertisements is utilised in the maintenance of the radio station operations.

Background

It was in 1947 when the first attempts at community radio broadcasting were done in Colombia and Bolivia (UNESCO, 2003; Buckley, 2008). However, lobbying for community radio began in the 1960 when Hoggart and Hall (1964) wrote about why local radio should not be commercial. In the following year Powell (1965) also discussed how publicservice radio can develop local content with significant input from local community organisations (Browne,2012). World Assembly of Community Radio Broadcasters or AMARC, for short (Quebec, *La Assemble Mondiale des Artesans des Radio Communautaires* in French) has been very pivotal in the development of community radio.

In the West the proliferation of pirate radio stations in the 1960s and 1970s led the governments to introduce them officially as local radio stations. This marked the commencement of community radio. The 1980s saw the growth of community radio in the West and Asia. It was in the 1990s that Asia, Latin America and Africa started having community radio (Buckley, 2008: Browne, 2012). Community radio operations are very popular and legally recognized in many parts of the world including some African countries. However, Zimbabwe has not licenced any community radio station. It only has public service radio operating as Zimbabwe Broadcasting

Corporation (ZBC) and two commercial radio stations which started operating in 2012.

The beginning of 2015 saw a further breakthrough in the fight against ZBC's monopoly as eight new commercial radio stations were licenced. While it is affable that there would be plurality in radio broadcasting in Zimbabwe, there is no miscellany as the ownership structures of the new radio stations are questionable. For instance the IMPI Report (2014:54) says, "The licencing of new radio stations by the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) has been perceived as unfair as the shareholders of the organisations that were awarded were viewed as sympathetic to the ruling party".[1] The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) Zimbabwe chapter also argues that this ploy by the government was an exhibition of insincerity in its initiative of freeing the airwaves. The proprietors of the new radio stations are aligned to the ruling party and are just an extension of the already existing ones (MISA, 2015). The African Review (2013) also comments:

> Zimbabwe's broadcasting industry is still controlled by the ruling Zanu PF party…. But the metropolitan radio licences which were handed over on … by the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) handed were to companies linked to President Robert Mugabe's ruling Zanu PF party and the government.

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[1]The Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) issued local commercial radio broadcasting service licences to eight companies. Zimpaper's Diamond FM has been licensed to broadcast in Mutare. Zimpapers also owns several newspapers which are aligned to the government and the ruling party. It has now been given the urge to spread its wing in radiobroadcasting by the addition of this new station to the already vibrant Star FM. AB Communications, which also runs ZiFM Stereo, was given two licences for Gogogoi FM and FAYA FM which will be broadcasting in Masvingo and Gweru respectively. AB Communications is majority-owned by Information Communication Technology minister Supa Mandiwanzira.BAZ also licensed Fairtalk Communications' two stations which are: Breeze FM to broadcast in Victoria Falls and Skyz Metro FM in Bulawayo. Other companies licensed are Ray of Hope trading as YA FM, which will be broadcasting from Zvishavane. State-owned Kingstons won two licences for KE100.4 FM and Nyaminyami FM, which will be broadcasting in Harare and Kariba respectively. Former ZBC chief executive Munyaradzi Hwengwere was given a licence to operate in Zvishavane.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The role of radio in community development has attracted a lot of interest from researchers. There have been a lot of calls for governments to free the airwaves and allow private players in the broadcasting industry (MISA, 2015). Although the current constitution has provisions for licencing community radio stations, presently the country does not have a single licence for community radio broadcasting. As discussed earlier the Zimbabwean broadcasting arena is fraught with radio stations that are aligned to the government and the ruling party (Moyo, 2012; African Media Barometer, 2013; MISA, 2014).

Community radio as a concept needs discussion at this juncture. There is no universally agreed definition of community or community radio (Browne, 2012; Gordon, 2012). Basically a community can be described as a group of people who come together for a mutual concern or pleasure thereby benefiting a wider society and bringing enhanced 'social capital'(Putman, 2000). It is rather difficult to specifically distinguish people of specific communities as some individuals may belong to different communities but place usually determines a community (McQuail, 2010; Browne, 2012). Scholars agree that a community can be based on the following: language, ethnicity, gender, generation, sexual orientationand topic of interest whether as a profession or a hobby (UNESCO, 2003; Ngui,2009; Lewis, 2012). Both place that is geographic location and community of interest are pivotal in discussing what constitutes a community.

Community radio is premised on the kind of people who are involved. However, different academics and lobbyists have come up with different definitions of community radio. Furthermore, the regulatory and legislative frameworks of countries determine what constitutes community radio (UNESCO, 2003; Buckley. 2008; Browne, 2012; Gordon,

2012).Fundamentally, a community radio serves a local community or people with similar interests. The similar interests are grounded in people sharing common language, gender, ethnicity, generation, religion, sexual orientation and professional as well as other interests. Community radio is there to cater for audiences for 'whom certain types of programmes and certain viewpoints are otherwise unavailable- in other words, it is an alternative' (Lewis, 2012:154).Generally, community radio is regarded as alternative media and it is valorized for its potential to enhance plurality and diversity (UNESCO, 2003; Buckley, 2003; Myers, 2009; Mhiripiri, 2011; Forde and Meadows, 2012; Moyo, 2012).Community radio is characterized by direct participation of community members, the community as audience and staff and volunteers as community (Lewis, 2012).

Community radio is a radio station 'by the people, close to the people and for the people' (UNESCO, 2003:5). It is a medium that provides voice to the voiceless and functions as an ambassador of the marginalised and is significant to communication and autonomous practices among citizens. Academics, activists as well as different legislations agree that community radio is supposed to be a non-profit organization comprising members of the community and its programmes are based on access and participation. Community radio stations should represent the interests of the community whether it is small and local or a broad social section (UNESCO, 2003, World Association of Community Broadcasters, 2008).What is affable is that community radio accords members the liberty to articulate and confront pertinent concerns, which explicitly target their community thereby making community members become their own agenda setters. They also become the subjects and not objects of radio programmes (Buckley,2008).

Community radio is defined differently in different nations. While it can be argued that communities of interest include religion, education, ethnicity and academic or university

broadcasting, in some countries these are treated separately. For instance in Canada and Colombia ethnic broadcasting is different from community broadcasting. In Australia ethnic broadcasting is the same as community broadcasting (UNESCO, 2003). In South Africa community radio stations are legal entities and they broadcasts all forms of interests of different communities. It is commonly regarded as 'complementary to the traditional media'(Teer- Tomaseli, 2001) The Ghanaian law does not encompass community radio broadcasting but they are recognised as private radio stations (African Media Barometer, 2013). Many countries in Africa have now licenced community radio stations but most of them are based on religion(IMPI Report, 2014).

Many scholars and activists agree that community radio is central in promoting freedom of expression but Ngui's 2009 study of community radio in Kenya proves otherwise. The research indicates how community radio was used in promoting post-election violence in Kenya in 2008. This unfortunate incident does not rule out the potential that community radio has in facilitating development in societies. There is agreement of direct community participation in community radio station but there is 'less of a consensus on whether real community radio stations should or should not play an advocacy role' (Lewis,2012:154).

While several African countries have completed and initiated steps towards the liberalisation of broadcasting through the licensing of private radio and television stations which work under monitoring codes and the directive of broadcast regulatory agencies, Cameroon and Zimbabwe have continued with a posture of indifference from the pluralisation of the 'electronic media space which is pervasive in other countries including their African neighbours' (Hungbo, 2011). This is largely done through the manipulation of strategies which pretend to permit the existence of other radio stations other than the national broadcasters. The government of Zimbabwe

has not granted any radio operating licences to many applicants who want to setup community radio stations but it has licenced commercial radio stations instead. This may be caused by the fact that the government does not trust those who want to setup the stations. The African Media Barometer Zimbabwe (2013:38) posits, "They suspect that community radio stations have a political agenda not sympathetic to… ZANU PF and that this could lead to 'regime change'" Because of that, there are no community radio stations in Zimbabwe but only Community Radio Initiatives (CRIs), which operate as trusts.

Research has been done on radio regulation in Zimbabwe and there is a consensus that the Zimbabwean government is reluctant to free the airwaves (Ndlela, 2007; Moyo, 2010; Mhiripiri, 2011; Moyo, 2012; Chuma, 2013 etc). Civil society and the academia have been lobbying for the licencing of community radios stations. MISA Zimbabwe Chapter has facilitated the registration and operation of CRIs through ZACRAS. Academics on the other hand have studied how the alternative radio stations are functioning. For instance Chuma (2013) discovered that clandestine radio stations in Zimbabwe used mobile phones in gathering and disseminating information during the 2008 Zimbabwe elections. Mhiripiri (2011) realised the role of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in radio broadcasting Community Radio Harare an unlicenced community radio station based in Harare, Zimbabwe. Moyo (2012) also established the significance of the internet and mobile phone in the operations of Radio Dialogue a Bulawayo based unlicenced community radio station in Zimbabwe.

The Broadcasting Services Act stipulates that community radio stations are not supposed to what carryany political content However, Zimbabwe has alternative radio stations in the form of clandestine radio stations which broadcast into the country through short-wave and medium wave as well as on-line. The unlicenced

community radio stations also contribute towards diversity and plurality but they are blamed for being sympathetic to opposition parties (Moyo,2004; Ndlela, 2007; Moyo, 2012; Chuma, 2013). Zeller (n.d) in Ndlela (2010) confirms this in defining clandestine radio as, "Radio stations designed to create political change within countries targeted by their transmission."All these studies act as background information to this study. Some generally look at whythe Zimbabwean government is reluctant in liberating the airwaves and lack of alternative radio stations. Others examine the different means through which the Zimbabwean populace is getting access to alternative radio. Mhiripiri (2011) and Moyo (2012) specifically examine the techniques employed by CORAH and Radio Dialogue in their operations as community radio stations. On the other hand Chuma (2013) analyses the use of mobile phones by radio stations. This study analyses sections of the BSA that directly deals with the licencing of community radio stations. It also investigates how CRIs are functioning when they are not licenced as radio stations.

Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature so it also requires qualitative methodology. Both purposive and convenience sampling were utilised in selecting the respondents. The primary technique used for gathering data was in-depth interviews. An official in the Ministry of Media, Information and Broadcasting Services was interviewed to get details on the government's official position on community radio licencing.Furthermore the state of community broadcasting in the country was analysed to enquire into what the statute guarantees in relation to what is prevailing. This was done through interviews with personnel from the CRIs, ZACRAS, human rights organisations and civic societies to get comments about the provision of

community broadcasting only in principle yet the actual licencing of community broadcasters has not been done since 2001 when BSA was enacted. Staff and volunteers at CRIs were interviewed to get information of how they are operating.

A thorough analysis of the instrument is done through critical discourse analysis. Content analysis of some of the programmes from CRIs was done so as to find out if they offer any alternative voice. The study also analysed documents that guide and define community radio stations in Zimbabwe.

Findings and Discussion

Obstacles in Licencing Community Radio

Legislation

The Zimbabwean constitution guarantees freedom of expression as well as media freedom. While there are other statutory regulation instruments, radio regulation in Zimbabwe mainly lies under the Broadcasting Services Act of 2001.The BSA section 7paragraph 2 reads:

7 Broadcasting and signal carrier licences

(2) A broadcasting licence shall authorise the licensee to provide any one of the

following classes of broadcasting service □

(*a*) a commercial broadcasting service;

(*b*) a community broadcasting service;

(*c*) a subscription satellite broadcasting service;

(*d*) a subscription cable broadcasting service;

(*e*) a subscription narrowcasting service;

(*f*) an open narrowcasting service;

(*g*) a datacasting service;

(*h*) a roadcasting service;

(*i*) a railcasting service;

(*j*) a webcasting service.

Community radio broadcasting is covered under item (b).This is an indication that in theory the Zimbabwe broadcasting arena includes community broadcasting as the third tier. However, in practice, there are no community radio stations. In an interview with an officer from the Ministry of Media, Information and Broadcasting Services this study established an official government standpoint. The official argued that the BSA lacks some clarifications on the operations of community radio stations. He further stated that there is need to amend the Act so that it clearly defines who constitutes members of a community, the content that is broadcast, who manages a community radio station as well as funding. If these are not clearly spelt out then there would not be any community radio station in the country. However an analysis of the BSA explains what community broadcasting entails. The act describes it this way:

"community broadcasting service" means a free-to-air (radio or television) broadcasting service not operated for profit or as part of a profit-making enterprise which□

(*a*) provides programmes□

 (i) for community purposes; and

 (ii) is capable of being received by commonly available equipment; and

(*b*) does not broadcast programmes or advertisements on behalf of any political party; and

(*c*) otherwise complies with any classification criteria that may be applicable to such a service in terms of subsection (2)

The government however feels that there is need to amend the act so that it would be easy+ to regulate the licencing of community radio stations. The official was privy to the details of what is really lacking in the Act.

Activists from the civil society organisations concurred with the government official on the issue of amending the BSA(2001). Their main concern is on the powers and composition of the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ). The section on 'board' needs to be amended so that it becomes independent like Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) of South Africa (UNESCO, 2003). While the IBA's independence can be questionable, (Teer-Tomaseli, 2008; Duncan and Glenn, 2010) it is an example of an attempt at privatising broadcast regulation in Africa.

Lack of Framework

Another setback in the licencing of community radio stations concerns lack of framework of what constitutes a community. An official from the government stated that a framework is in the pipeline and he would not disclose any information as the project is in its infancy stages. He said that once the framework is molded then can they licence community radio. When asked why it is taking long to produce the framework, he said that the Ministry is busy with the digitalisation process. He reiterated that the government would be able to consider applications for community radio once the digitalization project has been completed.

The government's position on what defines a community is different from that of donors who fund them. As said earlier, the government's framework is still in the pipeline but the official hinted that it would be framed on the following lines: 'A community is a group of

people coming together for a noble cause and are prepared to accept government intervention'. MISA Zimbabwe (2015) concurs with the government stance on formulating a policy framework on what defines a community in community broadcasting. They are of the view that the law should clearly define what a community is and this would in turn assist in demarcating what community broadcasting involves. For purposes of assisting in the setting up of community radio station in the country, ZACRAS has a working definition of a community. It states that a community is 'a group of people sharing either a geographical area or common interests.' Although there is no universally agreed definition of a community (Lewis, 2012) this is in tandem with what many academics and lobbyists want (UNESCO, 2003; Buckley, 2008; Gordon, 2012;Browne, 2012).

Information gathered from interviews with members of the civil societiesindicates that in the lobbying negotiations that they do with the government, they have contrasting notions of what a community is. This then directly affects what constitutes community broadcasting. The lobbyists indicated that they were told bygovernment that although it has not been finalized there are not going to be any community radio stations in urban areas. The unofficial government position as stated by civil society groups is that community radio is for rural areas where the village head and the chief are supposed to be the coordinators in the operations of the radio stations. They again stated that they were told that urban areas do not have such administrative structures so it is not possible to set up urban based community radio stations. The interviewees further indicated that it is the reason why the government has recently licencedurban based commercial radio stations. However, the government official professed ignorance of these allegations and maintained that the government is still working on the policy framework.

Political Will

The government of Zimbabwe does not have the political will of licencing community radio stations. Radio has in Third World countries constantly been alleged to be a probableinstrument for community modification and transformation. Architects of community radio stations have been viewed as groups fired up by anache and vision for change(Buckley, 2008;Ngui, 2009; Kijana, 2012). The government official interviewed for this study repeatedly said that the donor funded community radio stations do not have any other agenda but to instil the spirit of regime change through undemocratic means. He argued that the messages that they disseminate are purported to be educating listeners on democratic governance. But in actual fact they are propagating Western ideologies that seek to topple the democratically elected ZANU PF government.

The interview with the officialshowed that the government fears that community radio content can lead to political instability. The contribution of community radio in post-election violence Kenya in 2008 might be scaring the Zimbabwean government.Some African statesmen argue that due to the fragility of 'young' independent African governments they have a strangle hold over broadcast media in order to prevent civil unrest (Mamdani, 1996; des Forges, 1999; Kijana, 2012). However, countries which do not have any histories of civil strife still cling to the control of broadcasting in the form of ownership and statutory regulation. Zimbabwe has not been economically unstable for more than a decade now and this might result in civil unrest. It could be one of the reasons why the government is reluctant to free the airwaves (Moyo, 2010).The official also stated that the government is busy with the digitalisation process to worry about community radio stations.

Respondents from civil society organisationsalso complained about the government's lack of political will to grant licences to community radio stations. A news editor at CORAH insinuated that community radio is very powerful and can sway public opinion. For him, this could be one of the reasons why there are no licenced community radio stations.

Regulatory Structures

In the BSA regulation of radio is governed by the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) a board which is directly linked to the government.The President and the Minister of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services are directly responsible for everything associated with broadcasting. While there are countries which purport to have private regulatory bodies, there are still debates regarding the independence of those bodies (Teer-Tomaseli, 2008; Duncan and Glenn, 2010). Many African countries have no clearly defined broadcasting policies and this has led to complications in the administration of broadcasting systems. Zimbabwe is one of such states. The respondents agreed that the composition and framework of BAZ culminates in the failure by the government to award licences to community radio stations. Like in many African states the regulatory board lacks autonomy thereby prohibiting the smooth flow of radio regulation.

Frequencies

One of the hindrances of community radio is the allocation of frequencies. The information obtained from the interviews indicates that there is only hope of the availability of frequencies after the digitalization process. However, some respondents from the civil society groups and CRIs are of the view that the government is only using this as a scape goat but in reality there is no political will on the part of the government. One respondent from a CRI said that even if they do not get licences after digitalization,

they will still broadcast through other means like the internet and bulk short messages, whatsapp and the distribution of recorded CDs.

Finance

While finance can be a hindrance in the licencing of community radio. Zimbabweans do not have resources to set up radio stations but there are donors who can afford to sustain community radio.However, the government does not tolerate this funding as this would affect radio content. MISA Zimbabwe proposed $500- as registration fees. Equipment for broadcasting of community radio stations is also not so expensive for Zimbabwe. The establishment of community radio is affected by money but primarily by the politics of the government among other factors.

Community Radio Initiatives

As said earlier there are no community radio stations in the country. There are CRIs which are backed by ZACRAS. ZACRAS is a brainchild of MISA and it was set up to assist CRIs prepare for broadcasting after they have been awarded licences. These organisations are not licenced community radio stations but are registered as trusts. The government of Zimbabwe does not recognize their existence and regards them as illegal entities. The fact that they are allowed to broadcast is questionable. Capitol Radio had its equipment confiscated for broadcasting without a licence but CORAH and Radio Dialogue are broadcasting through the internet. It can be argued that the government is awarding constitutional rights of freedom of expression to its citizenry. An official at Radio Dialogue stated that due to technological advancement it might be futile to confiscate equipment because the gadgets that are used for broadcasting are very small and can fit into a pocket. The equipment is also inexpensive that they can easily get replacements. What is mainly needed for satellite broadcasting is vibrant internet connection.

There are 28 CRIs in the country and they are based in both rural and urban areas. Examples are Radio Dialogue in Bulawayo, Community Radio Harare (CORAH), Wezhira in Masvingo, Nkabazwe FM in Gweru, Kwelaz in Kwekwe, (MISA Zimbabwe, 2013, ZACRAS, 2012). The CRIs are manned mainly by volunteers from the community and two to three administrative staff members depending on the size of the station.

Lack of licencing resulted in them broadcasting without real transmission but through roadcasting, the internet, messages over mobile phones as well as recording, distribution and playing radio programmes using compact discs (Mhiripiri, 2011;Moyo,2012; Chuma, 2013). Since this is not real transmission some audiences do not get immediate information as in 'real' radio.The unlicenced community radio stations also contribute towards diversity and plurality but they are blamed for being sympathetic to opposition parties. They also hold community meetings where they discuss and record topical issues on health, education, culture, service delivery, language and human rights concerns. The radio stations use local languages in their programming. However, the two most prominent CORAH and Radio Dialogue also uses English. The community meetings are sometimes disrupted by law enforcement agents who want these meetings to be sanctioned first. It is very difficult to get police clearance since most donor funded organisations are suspected of promoting the regime change agenda.

Funding comes from Western states and this also has its predicament as the donors claim that they no longer afford. An official at ZACRAS lamented that funding was reduced by 70% at the beginning of 2015.The other issue with donor funding that was raised was the fact that sometimes donors do not offer financial assistance but they can volunteer to provide studio equipment or to train staff and volunteers.

However, the interviewees argued that once community radio stations have been established the donors' interventions will be withdrawn. The communities would fund themselves through income generating projects like poultry and horticulture.

The programme content also includes music from unknown artists whose work does not get recognition from the mainstream broadcast media. They also broadcast poems and drama from the marginalised and unpopular artists. Like most community radio stations, CRIs in Zimbabwe articulate the voice of the marginalised communities. Journalists from the CRIs confirmed that they have breached ethical standards in order for them to gather news. Since CRIsare said to be illegal, the journalists are accredited as free-lance and this would guarantee them access to news sources. However, they argued that when it comes to news articles, they endeavour to balance stories. They encounter problems with government officials who do not want to cooperate and they sometimes get information from other journalists.

Of all the CRIs, CORAH and Radio Dialogue are the most vibrant. The internet plays an invaluable role in the communication activities of Radio Dialogue. Besides their website, Radio Dialogue uses social network sites such as Facebook, Whatsapp and Tweeter. They also use two specialized forms which are: Frontline SMS and Freedom Fone. Both of these technologies require the use of the convergence of the computer and the mobile phone and allow interaction between the radio station and the audiences. While the Front SMS uses written messages only, the Freedom Fone goes further to include voices from the station as well as the audiences. Convergence has boosted the attribute of radio as a 'medium of information and discussion' (Hendy, 2000:194), as citizens now vigorously contribute in the negotiations about concerns that affect their lives. This formula of communication augments the public sphere perception by Hurgen Habermas

but it still has some confines as it only accommodates the wealthy who can afford mobile phones.

Community Radio Harare (CORAH) is another significant entity that has enabled citizens to have access to alternative radio content. Community Radio Harare (CORAH) is a community radio initiative whose intensions are to broadcast to the low-income citizenry in the high density suburbs of Harare. CORAH was formed in 2003 following the promulgation of the Broadcasting Services Act (2001) which sought to liberalise the airwaves and it was registered as a Trust in June 2006. Since its founding CORAH has carried out community media advocacy effort in this geographical footprint but also enticed the interest of low-income populations in towns outside Harare extending its advocacy area to a radius of about 70km around Harare. It utilizes the free-to-air (FTA) satellite radio on Channel Zim, a radio channel that CORAH shares with Radio Dialogue, Radio Voice of the People (VOP) and SW Radio Africa. CORAH is also involved in the distribution of recorded CDs and has live broadcasts on both the Internet and satellite dishes. Like Radio Dialogue, CORAH uses the bulk sms strategy, whatsapp as well as community meetings which are held at ward level. However, this CRI is only active in the capital city and people in rural areas still rely on the PSB and commercial radio stations.

Conclusionand Recommendations

Community radio is an essential component of radio broadcasting as it addresses developmental needs at grassroots level.There is need for the government to free the airwaves and licence community broadcasters so that the majority of Zimbabweans have access to radio. The paper established that there are obstacles that hinder the licencing of community radio. These are: legislation, frequencies, regulatory structures, political will, finance and lack of framework.The Zimbabwean populace get alternative radio from CRIs, on-line radio and foreignbased radio

stations. ZACRAS was set up to assist CRIs in the establishment of community radio stations. Presently CRIs are broadcasting illegally as they are only registered as trusts. The most vibrant of these CRIs are CORAH and Radio Dialogue. Besides broadcasting via the internet, these alternative media platforms make use of CDs, bulk smses, whatsapp, facebook and community meetings to disseminate information. Their programme content is varied and the news items mainly cover developmental issues that directly affect audiences who are also active participants in the radio stations.

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