



FARM COMMUNITIES IN ZIMBABWE:

using radio for advocacy and communication

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The aim of my research was to assess the use radio for advocacy and communication in community development, focusing on radio as a medium, radio audience behaviour in farm communities, issues affecting farm communities, advocacy and communication of the issues through radio, and power dynamics in programme production. The study attempted to do so by answering the overall question 'how and why radio?'.

SCOPE AND CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

My research focused on the use of radio for the purpose of advocating for, and communicating, issues affecting vulnerable communities affected by the land reforms implemented by the government of Zimbabwe as from the year 2000.

In humanitarian and development terms, these people are technically referred to as either internally displaced persons (IDPs) or mobile and vulnerable persons (MVPs), hereinafter referred to as IDP/MVP population. This is because the people have found themselves without land rights (no place to call home), some without sources of livelihood (employment) or other human entitlements as they live on the farms or internally migrate from place to place, voluntarily or otherwise.

The research was based on the communication, advocacy and lobby strategy of a radio programme undertaken by the non-governmental organization Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe (FCTZ) in addressing the rights and needs of the IDP/MVP population.

THE CASE STUDY

FCTZ was established in 1996 by Save the Children UK and the Commercial Farmers' Union, with the active support of the General Agriculture and Plantation Workers' Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ) and

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the government of Zimbabwe. Its major objective since its inception has been to improve the quality of life of vulnerable groups living and/or working in former large-scale commercial farms and informal settlements, estimated at 1.5 million, or 10% of the country's 11.75 million population (FCTZ, 2004: 2).

Among other ways to achieve the overall objective, a radio programme - *Upfumi Kuvanhu*, literally 'Wealth to the People' - was launched in 1999 as a medium of communication to influence the policy and public agendas in a manner that would address the plight of the IDP/MVP population. The objective of the programme is to promote development in farm communities in the areas of health, education and childcare, and to raise awareness on farm worker issues.

THE STATE OF RADIO BROADCASTING IN ZIMBABWE

The Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings (ZBH), a company wholly government owned and controlled monopolizes Zimbabwean airwaves. Radio Zimbabwe, which allocates airtime to the FCTZ *Upfumi Kuvanhu* radio programme, is one of the four radio stations of the holding company. The government monopoly on radio and the whole broadcasting industry is an inheritance from the colonial era (1890–1980). When independence was attained in 1980, the ownership pattern of the industry did not change.

Although the Broadcasting Act of 2001 provides for the liberalization of the airwaves to allow private commercial and not-for-profit broadcasters into the industry, the government continues to uphold stringent measures that make it difficult for private players to get started.

The partnership between Radio Zimbabwe and FCTZ should be understood in two contexts. Firstly, establishing a stand-alone FCTZ radio is a difficult endeavour considering the unfavourable legal environment. Secondly, the convenience and cost-effectiveness of relying on the infrastructure and manpower of an existing national radio station appears more reasonable than going along the private radio route. The existence of the FCTZ radio programme lies more in the latter option than the former.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

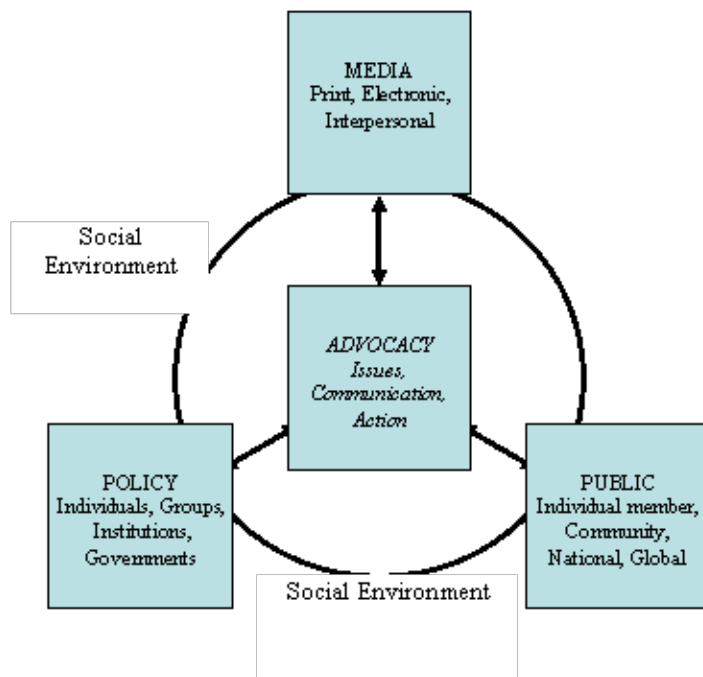
Advocacy: setting the agenda for development action

The FCTZ radio programme is an inter-marriage of communication, advocacy and community development. As such, it is imperative to define 'advocacy' before explaining how it applies to the case of FCTZ. Advocacy is perhaps what all individuals and institutions do everyday, consciously

or unconsciously, to push specific agendas and make progress. It is “an ongoing process aiming at change of attitudes, actions, policies and laws by influential people and organizations with power, systems and structures at different levels for the betterment of people affected by the issue” (International HIV/AIDS Alliance, 2004: 12).

My research defines advocacy simply as ‘agenda-setting’. Advocacy is about influencing issues to affect actions, which is what FCTZ seeks to do through the radio programme. According to Dearing and Rogers (1996: 2), agenda setting is an ongoing competition among issue proponents to gain the attention of media professionals, the public and policy elites. Agenda setting offers an explanation to the question of why information about certain issues and not others is available to the public in a democracy; how public opinion is shaped; and why certain issues are addressed through policy actions while others are not. The study of agenda setting is the study of social change and social stability (Dearing and Rogers, 1996: 2). Agenda setting mutates and revolves around the *media agenda*, the *public agenda*, the *policy agenda*, and the obvious interrelationships among these three elements.

Processes of advocacy can be started at any of the three levels of agenda setting: media, public and policy. It is important to note that the media and communication are the prime movers of all advocacy activities. Advocacy is about communication of issues through various media and at various levels. Therefore, advocacy communication processes are at the centre of the viscous cycle of public, media and policy platforms as illustrated in the model below.



*Maputseni's model for the communication of advocacy processes, 2006
(a derivation from Dearing and Rogers's 1996 Agenda Setting Theory)*

In the case of the FCTZ radio programme, issues emanate from the social environment -the farm communities- where they affect the IDP/MVP population. The need for communication and action on these issues arises naturally, creating space for advocacy work. The advocacy process can be kick-started at and by any of the three entities: public, media and policy. Advocacy activities may be undertaken by and/or through the public interpersonally, the media or policy makers. Action to address issues being advocated for may be spontaneous or organized. Action is usually more likely to produce long-lasting solutions if issues are embodied in the policy agenda, which is usually legislated. When this happens, further advocacy for action will be reinforced and much more justified.

METHODOLOGY

My research was both qualitative and quantitative. Research procedures and methods undertaken included sampling, case study, participant observation, qualitative interviewing, audience research and questionnaire survey.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The radio programme

Upfumi Kuvanhu - "Wealth to the People" - is used as a forum to communicate and advocate for policy attention to the plight of the IDP/MVP population working and/or living in the commercial farms, former commercial farms and related informal settlements. It is broadcast during the prime time slot every Tuesday, from 6.45 to 7 p.m., as a 15' discussion programme. Its main objective is to promote development in farm communities in areas of health, education and childcare and to raise awareness on other farm worker issues that risk being neglected. It targets the farm communities and policy makers among the government, local authorities, NGOs, the private sector and other interested parties. It is broadcast nationally as a sponsored programme on Radio Zimbabwe, in the local *Shona* language. Its contents are gathered from four of Zimbabwe's ten provinces where FCTZ is present: Mashonaland East, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland West and Manicaland.

Production: processes, power and control

Four major steps and players involved at different levels were identified in the production of the radio programme through participant observation. Informal interviews with FCTZ communications personnel revealed that the initial step is the production of a schedule in the form of a written guide on what themes or content will make up the programmes.

Production of this schedule is mainly controlled by FCTZ, in close consultation with Radio Zimbabwe for compliance of the programme's content with the broadcaster's editorial policy. The IDP/MVP population is not very visible in this process. FCTZ plays the advocate role –“advocacy is speaking up, drawing a community's attention to an important issue, and directing decision makers toward a solution” (The Centre for Development and Population Activities, 1995: 12).

The second stage involves the discussion of the programme's schedule between FCTZ and the IDP/MVP population, to agree on the issues to be raised, and identify activities to be recorded and the community people that will be interviewed by Radio Zimbabwe as representatives. At this stage, community participation becomes visible and essential, as the face-to-face discussions become a platform to bring out pertinent issues to the attention of the community that should realize the need to take action. The empowerment of the communities at this stage is limited to their being allowed a saying in issues to be discussed on radio. Considering that this takes place after FCTZ already has produced a draft of the issues, elements of a top-down approach to the radio programming are overtly evident. The sequence of the first and second stages is interchangeable. In terms of the control and influence on the content to make up the radio programme, a Radio Zimbabwe producer revealed in an interview that FCTZ holds 30%, IDP/MVP Population 30% and Radio Zimbabwe 40%. Taken as one party, FCTZ -the sponsor and advocate- and the IDP/MVP population largely control the programme, with a combined 60% degree of control and influence. This still falls short of the programme being independent from Radio Zimbabwe.

Stage 3 is the actual production of programmes. Using the schedule, Radio Zimbabwe goes to the field with or without FCTZ to carry out interviews and recordings. The process involves travel to the remotest parts of the country, spending whole days interacting with and speaking to the IDP/MVP population. At this stage, the IDP/MVP population has been informed about recording appointments in advance, and organizes under a tree or some shelter at a central place. The people will give interviews and most of the times sing about their problems or successes: songs become musical interludes during the programme's broadcasts. At the production level, the IDP/MVP population is allowed to speak out freely when it comes to opinions about the issues agreed on the programme schedule.

*Councillor Deliwe Nondo of Chihwiti area,
Mashonaland West province giving an
interview.*



Chihwiti people break into song and dance.

When the production crew arrives, its leaders in conjunction with FCTZ field staff introduce it to the community. Immediately the people organize themselves and the interviews take place in the presence of all those concerned. As the community representatives give interviews, a Radio Zimbabwe journalist and FCTZ communications officer take turns to ask questions that allow the conversation to flow. They allow the interviewee to speak freely about an issue as the interviewers make immediate follow-ups on issues arising from the responses of the interviewee.

One striking revelation from the production process is that the platform to be interviewed is usually given to women and youths/children, as they are believed to be more vulnerable and more conversant about the problems facing their communities.

The fourth and final stage is the sole responsibility of Radio Zimbabwe. When the journalist (producer/presenter) returns from the field, the content gathered is packaged into 15' programmes that span over a

number of weeks to come. The gate-keeping process starts right away. The producer submits programmes to the senior producer. After checking the programme content, the senior producer passes on the content to the executive producer, who edits it accordingly before signing off for broadcasting. The editorial control of Radio Zimbabwe is in most cases a formality, inasmuch as due care has been taken by FCTZ at the schedule and production stage. However, one incident was reported where Radio Zimbabwe cancelled one programme because it involved an NGO that had previously been accused by the government media of distributing condoms with politically motivated content. This was besides the fact that the censored programme was not about the condom, but about discussing a joint programme by FCTZ and the NGO to provide HIV&AIDS vocational counselling and testing services.

The farm community as audience: characteristics and preferences

The relevance and effectiveness of radio, to answer the question about the radio's *why* and *how*, cannot be achieved without finding out literacy levels and media tastes of the IDP/MVP population.

Out of the 195 sample for the audience survey, 162 respondents (88 ex-farm workers, 65 farm workers and 9 farmers) answered the questionnaire. The sample can also be split into 93 females and 69 males. The economically active age groups, 19-30 and 31-40 years old, account for the majority of the sample, being 65% of the farm community respondents. The education levels of the sample pointed to low levels of literacy, with 27% of the respondents being uneducated (never went to school).

Shona is the predominant language among the IDP/MVP population: 154 respondents, or 63% of the respondents, can at least speak and understand the language, while some can both read and write it. Forty-three can speak, read and write English.

In terms of audience, 85 (52.4%) respondents confirmed that they listen to the radio programme, while 75 (46.2%) respondents said they have not listened to it because they do not have or cannot afford radios, their radios are out of order, they are busy all the time, they have poor reception or do not know about the programme at all.

Of the 85 respondents that listen to the radio programme, 15 (18%) have listened to all programmes, 20 (24%) have listened to most programmes, another 24% have listened to few programmes, and 30 (34%) have

listened to the programme by chance -irregularly and whenever the programme catches their ears. The other 66% know very well when the programme is aired, and make it a point to switch on the radio when they can. The respondents said that they listen because they want to hear what is happening in other areas, get wisdom and advice about life and issues affecting them, and hear what FCTZ has in store for them.

Radio compared with other media

Respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of the FCTZ communications programmes/strategies like *Upfumi Kuvanhu* (radio programme), *Budiriro Mumapurazi* (an FCTZ newsletter), workshops and newspaper/broadcasting news reports in educating and informing about farm community issues by using the following ratings: A – Excellent, B – Good, C – Fair, D – Poor and E – Very Poor.

The radio programme topped the grade, with 50 respondents finding it excellent. Forty-three respondents rated *Budiriro Mumapurazi* newsletter as excellent. Twenty-six respondents rated workshops excellent, while 33 rated news from newspapers and ZBC excellent. The radio programme tops the grading in all of the three acceptable or positive ratings A, B and C; although five respondents found it poor and another 5 rated it very poor. The newsletter came second to the radio programme in all the three positive ratings. Press and ZBC news come third in the positive ratings while workshops lagged last.

Comparing the audience habits regarding other media used by FCTZ, the radio programme is more popular and accessible. This is because radio cuts across literacy levels. Even those that cannot read or write can still hear the programme. Besides, radio can also be easily shared in a family or neighbourhood. The radio is a companion. People can work as they listen to it, and get entertained as well. Even busy people can get the message without having to stop their work. There is less effort required in listening to radio than in reading. However, the complementarity of broadcast and print media remains important. While radio messages mostly expire once broadcast, the newsletter's content can be stored and referred to for months or even years. Some letters to the editor in the newsletter relate to issues raised in the radio programme that the IDP/MVP population sent to FCTZ offices.

Impact and sustainability of the radio programme

According to Radio Zimbabwe, the radio programme has survived and grown over the past seven years because it is very educative and

informative about issues in the farm communities for the IDP/MVP population. In the future, the national broadcaster would love to have the programme produced countrywide in all the country's ten provinces.

“Radio Zimbabwe has remained a torch bearer for people in the countryside. It is within the broader mandate of the broadcaster to uplift the lives of the people in the farms. If you look at the listenership of the radio station, the base is wider in the rural areas and in the farms. It is important to widen the listenership and keep it through relevant programmes that transform lives,” Hlongwane, Producer/Presenter, Radio Zimbabwe (personal communication, 2006).

According to Hlongwane, this mandate of Radio Zimbabwe is what motivates it to keep the FCTZ programme on air more than the sponsorship money that FCTZ pays.

A legislator acknowledged that the radio programme informs the decision and policy-making processes initiated by the parliamentary portfolio committees on land and agriculture as well as on labour and social welfare, expressing that it is a source of information about issues of farm communities. In Zimbabwe, parliamentary portfolio committees research matters closely related to their areas of focus to bring them up for debate and policy decisions when parliament sits.

Informal discussions in the field revealed that “There is a problem in the effectiveness of radio since not everyone in rural areas owns a radio. It would be better if radios are placed in public points like beer halls or youth centres... talk shows are also essential”.

There is a strong feeling that the radio programme has introduced farm workers to the public. Testimonies that came from informal discussion considered that the programme has changed the public image of the IDP/MVP population.

“There are people out there that now know that we are here in Chihwiti and we are surviving. They hear about us and our issues from the radio programme. The people here feel good to see FCTZ and Radio Zimbabwe coming to talk to them and allow them to speak out their situations on the radio and hear outcomes of their requests for help. Chihwiti has been a neglected area for a long time without schools but because we have spoken out now we have Chihwiti and Chemukaka schools, which are operating. A third school is being constructed. We appreciate the radio people because

we can see our problems are reaching the right people,” said Deliwe Ndondo, councillor for the Chihwiti area, Mashonaland West province.

One striking example of the impact of the radio programme is the case of the Kanyaga School in the Gambuli area, which had a serious shortage of classroom blocks. The situation was covered in one edition of the radio programme. Within weeks, a multinational corporation approached the school’s development association with a grant to build an additional block at the school after hearing about its plight on the radio.

Great disparities regarding ownership of radio sets and being able to afford batteries to power them exist in the farm communities, limiting access to information for a significant proportion of the IDP/MVP population. Shorai Makota, a village health worker from the Gambuli area, lamented that, although a few people in his area have solar panels to recharge batteries, the majority find it hard to afford the batteries, let alone the radio sets. Makota recognized that while the radio programme gives his people an opportunity to raise issues, the programme is only information, which he said community leaders should take up with their Village Heads, Chiefs, Member of Parliament and Senator responsible for the area.

“When our leaders come to address us, many times they begin to talk about the very issues that we will be expecting them to address, which is a sign that they will have heard it from some where. I think they listen to the radio... or may be they read,” said Makota.

When communities hear about development activities that FCTZ is implementing with other communities from the radio programme, they seek its support, or support from other NGOs and donors, to introduce them in their areas.

The radio programme was said to have engendered transparency on the part of FCTZ, which reduces the government’s suspicion regarding its work within the sensitive farm communities. In this sense, the political survival of the radio programme is guaranteed in a country that has a coterie of restrictive media laws. Relying on a national government channel and operating under the cover of its editorial policy also gives a breath of life to the programme, as it is almost impossible to set up private or community radio stations in Zimbabwe.

FINDINGS

Findings from my research indicate that the radio programme will make more impact if the farm communities take a more active part in the communication processes. A community media model may enhance the quality and usefulness of the programme. The people must own the radio programme through taking part in coming up with programme ideas and being involved at every stage, even if this means getting the community to produce the initial production schedule.

It is important for the radio programme to incorporate as programme content the communication systems that the farm communities live with, rather than remaining a discussion programme. Communities in many developing countries freely express their issues and views through songs, drama and poetry. Through the forms of communication that belong to them, communities communicate their issues, problems, needs and solutions. Community feedback is also better obtained from the themes arisen in the performances and art forms, usually involving more community members than the interviews, in which a few representatives are asked for the discussion programme. The temptation to exercise self-censorship among individual community members during interviews is very high, considering the tense political situation in the country. Singing and acting together to communicate one message allows the people to take collective courage and speak out issues as they affect them. In such way, people will feel a bit more distanced from the direct consequences of their words. Therefore, an interchange of community communications and discussions between the communities and decision-makers on the radio programme is bound to bring out much better results. As increased numbers of the IDP/MVP population are allowed to speak out through the community communications, they will raise their issues and circumstances, and discussion programmes may then be limited to community representatives and decision-makers on different capacities. The community communications are building blocks for identity formation and empowerment.

At least in the areas in which FCTZ works, it will be very helpful if listening to the radio programme is more structured and systematic. Establishing radio-listening clubs along the lines of the Development-Through-Radio programme in Zimbabwe and the Canadian 'Farm Radio' would encourage active listening and action on the messages received. The clubs will be a vehicle for catching the full attention of the IDP/MVP population. When the clubs meet to listen, discussion becomes spontaneous, leading to ongoing dialogue, which gives the radio content emotional and geographical proximity to the people. The people will internalise the situations and circumstances they live with, and the need for remedial action will become imminent.

The functionality of the radio-listening clubs depends on the existence of appropriate infrastructure and systems to organize and motivate the IDP/MVP population. One of the concerns that came out in the course of this research was the disparities in terms of radio sets ownership among the IDP/MVP population. Due to the low incomes, owning a radio and getting the batteries to power it is just not affordable. As such, the functionality and sustainability of the clubs demands that communities be equipped with free or subsidised radio sets. Alternatively, FCTZ listening centres could be designated and equipped accordingly. The listening centres could take the form of radios placed in public points - beer halls, youth centres, community centres, schools and clinics- where people can have an opportunity to discuss what they hear on radio. Currently, FCTZ uses donor money to buy airtime from Radio Zimbabwe. A solid proposal on how such listening clubs would make possible an increased impact of the radio programme should be sufficient to attract more donor funds to set up and equip the clubs.

The community media activities and listening clubs may prove to be a cheaper option for national radio that may allow farmer-to-farmer voices, complementing the top-down approach. However, compliance with Radio Zimbabwe would mean that while the cost of the community radio license is avoided, the 'high cost of free lunches' -that is, the cost of being hosted by Radio Zimbabwe- will always imply that the communities are never in total control of the radio programme.

To cut short the delay in feedback, some editions of the radio programme would need to be interactive and issue-based, involving phoning in. In this way, the IDP/MVP population, although only a few of them have phone access, would be more prepared to bring out hot issues than in the presence of the production crew and community members. They would feel more independent, and every topic of discussion would thus provoke more and more questions. Such kind of discussion programmes would be ideal especially in those editions where Radio Zimbabwe allows policy makers or decision-makers to speak in response to issues raised by the IDP/MVP population in previous programmes.

While relying on the broadcasting expertise and infrastructure of Radio Zimbabwe may be a convenient marriage with FCTZ at present, it is not necessarily the best arrangement. When circumstances allow, it would be better to transform the radio programme into a stand-alone community or farm radio dedicated to the IDP/MVP population. This would allow more broadcasting time than the current 15' per week, and more innovative programming.

CONCLUSIONS

In its present form, the FCTZ radio programme is largely mass media based, hence the top-down approach. The IDP/MVP population is consulted on issues to be discussed on air and is interviewed, but the people are not directly in control of the radio programme. They have access to it, but they do not own or control it. A satisfactory participatory model would only materialize as from a balanced blend of community and mass media. A possible route to achieving that in the future would be to work with the community in fully utilizing the community media to articulate issues, thereby directly producing programmes and only going through the mass media route as an opportunity to send a message to a large audience. The participatory approach would allow FCTZ to get the two parties involved - IDP/MVP population and policy/decision makers - to speak together. Thus, an interchangeable top-down and bottom-up process would be established. Advocacy involves different parties that should get fair opportunities to speak to each other. Community media would allow more deep-seated issues to come out, while the mass media (radio) projects the issues to the targeted audience.

Community media may also be useful at interpersonal communication: the IDP/MVP population may further explain and simplify messages from the radio through song, drama or poetry. Community media is good at catching the attention of people: packaged as entertainment, yet loaded with useful information. The potential of the community media approach remains a rich opportunity for FCTZ to explore. However, it demands more resources and attention to set up community structures that will get it running and keep the momentum.

Despite the limitations, through my research I arrived to the conclusion that radio remains a suitable mass medium for community development. Although it is not an answer to poverty and deprivation by itself, it is a potentially helpful starting point for cutting back human suffering.

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