Funding and Operating Community Radio in Ghana: The Case of Tawasul Radio in the Tamale Metropolis.

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Abstract

This study investigated funding and operation of community radio station in Ghana with the Tawasul community radio being the case. The qualitative case study was adopted focusing on key informant as respondents for the study. Findings revealed that financial and managerial constraints have bedeviled Tawasul community radio leaving it in a state of apology of its classification. The station lacks competitive edge and financially limping as it could be shut down any day. Again, the weak regulatory irresponsibility is another bane of the fortunes of the station. Tawasul is a pale shadow of a community radio. Urgent steps including financial could salvage its collapse. The National Communication Authority must enforce its regulations on community radio to sustain the concept for the citizenry.

Key words: Community radio, Funding, Operation, Tawasul.

1.0 Background of study

The reasons for establishing community radio station seven decades ago are as relevant today as there were at the time of their evolution. The Miners' radio in Bolivia and radio Sutatenza in Colombia were the pioneering community radio stations to be set up in 1947 as instruments in fighting injustices and poverty in Latin America. The miners' radio focused on uniting the miners to battle for better working conditions while Sutatenza was aimed at supporting a community of peasants.

In the case of community radio's experience in Africa, it was the Homa Bay community radio station in Kenya that was established in 1982 with the support of UNESCO. As the first of its kind in the continent, it was to help chart the path of development for the local people and as such some of the locals were trained in its basic operations to ensure community ownership, production and participation in its programmes. The two and half-year successes of the station exemplified that it was possible to operate community radio station with little capital and low-technology equipment anywhere. This gave the impetus for the rapid growth and development of community radio in the African continent.

Fraser and Estrada (2001) who have research extensively on the subject, proposed the need for community radio to be set up on a non-profit basis to maximize its potential. Suggesting that, funding must come from diverse sources including donations, grants, membership fees, sponsorship and advertisement. To widen the financial muscle, it is suggested that operators of community radio must undertake fund raising activities and campaigns all in attempts to ensure financial sustainability. This suggestion implies a distinct funding and operational status of

community radio as unique model from the mode of public and commercial radio operations which draws their funding purely from government and advertisers respectively.

Radio and in particular community radio emerged as a tool for community members to interact among themselves frequently and easily in addressing issues that affect them in their localities in order to find solutions affecting their lives. The phenomenon of community radio emerged in Ghana in 1998 as a tool for community engagement and interaction at the community level as not for profit-making medium. Its expansion in recent years has been rapid in the country registering 71 community and 22 campus radio stations as of the last quarter of 2018, (NCA). Out of the 71 community radio stations operating in Ghana, 15 are in the northern region alone.

Diendong and Naaikuur (2012) posited that the deregulation of the broadcasting space in Ghana in the 1995 has greatly influenced the growth and rapid expansion of community radio in the country stressing that the concept of community radio has potentials since it is viable in the style of programming and efficient in language usage. It has created numerous opportunities and educated many rural folks on some basic developmental challenges confronting them. The scholars suggested the need for a more true democratic operation and management of community radio stations in the country so as to achieve the full benefit of the concept.

Community radio as documented, is challenged with efficient participation and sustainability of its operations in the Sub-region. A major challenge is that most stations are not realizing the goals and objectives by which they were setup because the ownership is not truly community representative hence is not serving the real problems of the community. Genuine community ownership and participation results in engaging inefficient volunteers and professionals who produce programmes without considering the marginalised concerns in society. The ownership

problem has also resulted in lack of clear policies and objectives and preclusion of organised publics and groups for community broadcasting (Diedong and Naaikuur, 2012).

Ownership of community radio in Ghana appears to be problematic in some cases. Instead of communities owning and operating community radio for their community's interest, it appears the situation is not the case giving way for donor agencies and some interest groups to own and operate community radio stations for their selfish interest. A case in point is the Simli radio based in Kumbungu in the Northern region and radio for Peace and Development (PAD FM) in the Savana region. Simli radio is owned by Ghana Developing Communities Association, a Danish NGO and PAD is equally owned and funded by Self Reliance and Sustainability Development Initiative, a non-governmental organisation formed by the Catholic Church Archdiocese of Damongo in the Savana region. Once donors own these radio stations, programme contents are likely to be dictated by donor interest instead of community interest (Kwode, 2016).

The significant role that community radio is believed to possess seems to be eroding. "Community radio is often theorized as being (1) independent from political and economic influence and (2) a platform for the meaningful engagement of marginalized populations traditionally excluded by its private and commercial cousins. Contrasting this theoretical model against the reality of practice, this study argues that the theorized benefits of community radio are unlikely to be realized given the reality of donor, rather than community, funding structures", (Conrad, 2014).

Given that participation and funding are major obstacles affecting the operational sustainability and efficiency of community radio operations, this study therefore investigates funding and operation of community radio in the Northern region of Ghana using Tawasul community radio

station as the case. Among the study's objectives is to; investigate community member's ownership and participation in Tawasul community radio. It is also to explore the operations of Tawasul community radio and understand the funding sources and sustainability of Tawasul community radio in the Tamale metropolis.

2.0 Literature Review

Conrad (2013), discovered sustainability challenges of community radio rendering its efficiency to question. It was realised that Community Radio in East Africa was sustained through donor funding and other organisational structures. It also points out that political economy played significant roles in community radio practice. Using an in-depth interview with a sample size of 64 respondents who included radio managers, staff and experts working in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, the study revealed that the kind of journalism practiced in the study areas was different from the typical community radio practice.

Conrad (2013) focused on local funding structures using six community radio stations operating in East Africa as the case study. The study debunked theoretical perspectives on Community media and argues that scholar's "proclivity to privilege community radio as model alternative to everything else has created an archetype that may not exist in practice". Spending four months on field study, the results showed that historical and regulatory context plays significant roles in the way such stations operate. Results demonstrated that the region's oldest operating Community radio stations went on air between the year 2000 and 2004 as part of the East Africa Community Media Pilot Project. The project was a partnership between the local development organizations and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA).

Conrad (2013) indicates that East African community radio stations are fully funded by donor agencies and this he indicates defeats the purposes of community radio since the donors would continue to dictate the kind of programmes broadcast in such stations. The concerns have been captured in these words;

> Foreign donors are woven into the history of community radio; it was a foreign donor agency that facilitated and funded the training of community journalists and the construction of the stations from the very beginning. Although funding from SIDA ended in 2007, several other donors have since taken their place and continue to demonstrate leadership and financial commitment to the development of the community radio sector in East Africa; UNESCO has supported the creation of about two dozen stations in Tanzania since 2008.

Faisal and Alhassan (2018) conducted a study on community access and participation in radio Gaakii in the North East region of Ghana. The study adopted a cross sectional survey design with a multistage sampling strategy to sample 150 respondents from five listening communities to participate in the study. It also used indepth interviews to purposively collect data from the management of the community radio.

Findings indicated that participation in radio Gaakii's broadcast is limited to the radio programme listening stage and community members mostly participate through the use of mobile phones during phone-in-segments. "The influx of mobile phones in the country has made it much easier for community-based radio listeners to participate in live studio discussions during programme listening. This new mode of participation gives satisfaction to listeners who are often able to follow discussions, contribute ideas, clear their doubts and even send greetings to family

and friends" (Faisal & Alhassan, 2018), stressing that such acts has increased participation in community radio broadcasting.

The study recommended among others that members of listening communities should be involved in the management, governance, programming and financing decisions of the station in a democratic manner to give them a sense of ownership thereby limiting the powers of donors and sponsors in the programming of radio Gaakii. Again the study suggested the need for management of the station to set up listenership clubs within the broadcast communities to ensure higher participation in the programmes and activities of the station. The club members should also be trained on programme production to enable them produce quality programmes and also enhance and sharpen their fundraising skills.

3.0 Research Method

The qualitative case study was adopted in studying the operation and funding of Tawasul community radio in the Tamale metropolis of Ghana. Neuman (2014), points out that case study examines individuals, organisations, movements, events and geographic units through a detailed, varied and extensive studies. It can be used to examine for instance the funding and operation of Tawasul community radio case in the Tamale metropolis. As a qualitative study, Yin (2011) indicates that it can be used to study social phenomenon under real world conditions by representing the views and perspectives of participants.

Data was collected through indepth interviews, observation and documents. When data is triangulated from different sources, it adds to the study's credibility and trustworthiness (Yin, 2011). An indepth interview was conducted with the manager of Tawasul community radio to understand the funding and operational activities and production programmes of the station. Two

key listeners and two staff of the station were purposively interviewed on the programmes of Tawasul community radio. Purposive sampling is a type of sampling convenient for qualitative case study research. It enable researchers to select respondents or sites through which the researcher can obtain 'information rich' and relevant to the subject under study. Purposive sampling enables the researcher "to select a sample from which the most can be learned", (Merriam, 2002:12). Observations about the operations of the station were made while secondary documents were collected from sources and analysed. Baxter and Jack (2008) state that in a case study, data can be collected using multiple sources and then converging into the analysis process rather than handled individually.

Inductive data analysis procedure as one of the features of qualitative data analysis was adopted to analyse the large volume of data collected. By using this procedure; patterns, categorisation of data and thematic analysis were used to interpret the data collected. As indicated by Creswell (2009), patterns, categorisations and themes are built from the bottom up through organising data into abstract units. This process demonstrates effective working relationship between the themes and database until a comprehensive set of themes are arrived at. This enables the researcher especially this researcher to make sense of the entire data collected since as responses were subjected to good analysis after inductive analysis without any bias or manipulation of any data.

The population of this study was purposively selected from the population of community radio stations operating in the Northern region of Ghana. The Tawasul community radio station was purposely selected out of 15 community radio stations operating in the region because it is relatively unknown with no or little research conducted on it (NCA, 2018). Again, its unique location in an urban settlement makes it quite different from other community radio stations hence the need to purposively study it to understand its operational and funding strategies.

Findings of this study were analysed along the research questions which flowed from the objectives of the study. Some themes emerged from the data and have duly been discussed thematically to make sense of the large volume of data collected. Text and image data are too dense in qualitative research that they need to be themed. "In the analysis of the data, researchers need to 'winnow' the data….to aggregate data into a small number of themes, something like five to seven themes", (Creswell, 2014:245)

4.0 Results

The findings of this study have been analysed in accordance with the research questions which flowed from the objective of the study.

Q1. What is the community member's ownership and participation in Tawasul community radio?

The Tawasul community radio was initiated and established in Ghana through Mohammed Gadafi, former Libyan president. It was established in 2001 alongside the Ghana Libya Senior High Schools located at Kpapayili, a suburb of Tamale metropolis in the Northern region of Ghana. The main purpose of its establishment was to spread Islam and Quran teachings among the inhabitants but its ideals fizzled out when the benefactor of the station died in a political revolt in Libya in October, 2011. The station revived in 2014 after it was technically shut down for some years because of the death of the founder. In its reemergence, it was not focusing in serving religious needs but focused on development needs of the people. Its ownership in word is for the people in its catchment area but in reality, is fully owned by four individuals as its board members who see to the management and survival of the station. Its management is in the hands of a single individual who serves as the manager striving to bring the station on air on daily basis.

On community member's ownership, the manager of the station responded that "the community members are owners of the station by default. We have tried to explain to the people that the station is for them including the chief and the assemblyman of this area to understand the concept of community ownership but they don't contribute financially or materially to the progress of the station. We don't see any serious ownership from the community members but when it comes to our programmes participation, they participate in through phone-in-segments and text messages. Sometimes we do community entry where we broadcast from a specific community to discuss their developmental challenges. This attracts a lot of people to participate in our programmes". A respondent who listens to the station confirmed that they participate in the programmes of the station especially when issues bothering them are being discussed adding that they enjoy listening to the station during entertainment hours. Another respondent expressed worry of her inability to participate in the programmes through text messaging because she is not able to read and write hence is unable to text.

Q2. How is Tawasul community radio operated?

The operation of the station revolves around four people who serve as its board members with one of them as its manager. The manager is the sole engine of the station since its programmes and activities are all shouldered by this enthusiastic individual with the support of four other staffs and seven volunteers. The manager undertakes administrative decisions, programmes and finances duties of the station.

Tawasul operates on 95.7 fm frequency and stretches between 15 to 25 kilometers. This is despite the acceptable frequency radius of 5km for community radio range limit set by the National Communication Authority (NCA). This however has generated some warnings from the regulator but its warnings are yet to be strictly complied with by the station with arguments that

limiting its coverage to only 5kms will deny many communities the opportunity of getting access and participating in the Tawasul community radio programmes.

Tawasul renews its application fees annually and renews its licenses every five years with the last being 2017. It currently broadcasts to over 30 communities including Yapei in the newly created Savana region of Ghana. The station broadcasts from 6:00AM to 11 PM on daily basis to reach audience with its programmes which include education, information, health, sanitation, agriculture, entertainment, women empowerment. It also hosts a political talk show where political activists from different political viewpoints are invited to the studio to share their views on topical political happenings in the country. Its programmes are aired in both local languages and in English because of the cosmopolitan nature of its audience.

Q3. What is the funding source of Tawasul community radio?

The station currently does not have any sustainable financial source of funding. It survives through little moneys raised from announcements, playing of jingles and other commercial and promotional activities. "We don't have funding, I use my personal money in running the station. I sometimes feel like giving up but I still hope something good will come out one day", these are the responses of the manager of the Tawasul radio when asked about the funding source of the station. He goes further to indicate that the station generates little money from its commercials stating that they charge Gh₵10 for three slots of announcements and Gh₵5 per jingles and Gh₵100 for a month running of a jingle on air. These sources of funds are described as unsustainable as they are seasonal and similar to the funding source of commercial radio stations who operate in competitive environments with well-equipped machinery and managerial staff who are able to rake in resources to finance the activities of their rich programmes.

The Ghana Community Radio Network (GCRN), an umbrella organisation of community radio stations in Ghana sometimes support the station with some commercials from the national level which appears pretty good but such supports do not come frequent. The financial challenges affect the station so much that it pushes the station at the verge of collapsing. It barely can pay its five staffs on good days but runs into difficulties of meeting its operational cost in most times. Many proposals to Nongovernmental Organisations (NGOs) for partnership and funding are yet to receive the needed support.

4.1 Discussions

From the issuing findings, certain key themes need further analysis in relation to available literature and legal instruments to put meaning and interpretations in order to discount ambiguities.

Community radio challenged with funding.

Using the Tawasul community radio as the reference point, it is abundantly clear that community radio in Ghana is seriously constraint with funding nightmares. From a situation where individuals instead of community owning and funding community radio makes it disastrous and a deviation from acceptable standard where communities are supposed to own and fund community radio. A similar study conducted by this researcher raises similar funding challenges as it indicates that Simli community radio based in Kumbungu in the northern region and Pad FM in the Savana region of Ghana are donor funded. Simli radio is owned by Ghana Developing Communities Association, a Danish NGO and PAD is equally owned and funded by Self Reliance and Sustainability Development Initiative, a non-governmental organisation formed by the Catholic Church Archdiocese of Damongo in the Savana region. Once donors own these

radio stations, programme contents are likely to be dictated by donor interest instead of community interest (Kwode, 2017).

The Unwanted Witness project in Uganda in 2011 equally found that financial constraints affected the sustainability of community radio stations in that country. It states that, "all community radio stations in Uganda were established with external donor support. Rural communities can hardly afford to pull funds together to start a radio station". This simply implies that the issue of financial and sustainability factor is not knew to community radio concept but strategies to overcome it has been daunting task. It is therefore imperative for policy makers and more specifically governments to rethink and create funding opportunities to enable community radio stations operate unimpeded.

Ownership is problematic

Who owns community radio is as important as community radio itself. Per the operative guidelines, the NCA indicates that community radio station shall be owned and operated by its listening community. It shall be not-for-profit in character and in its operations. Again the management of the station shall be in the hands of those who listen to it. Community as used here refers to a community with identifiable and specified geographical features and a population. NCA defines community as: "the community must have something of central importance to their culture and possess a sense of continuity of traditional values. The community must have some concrete social structure to interact and identify with each other on all aspects of social, cultural and economic needs".

Tawasul community radio simple misses these conditions hence listeners are not committed to support the station. Again, the station is located in an urban settlement where the sense of community is missing among the residence.   Diedong and Naaikuur (2012), equally found that

community radio is challenged with ownership. They assert that a major challenge is that most stations are not realizing the goals and objectives by which they were setup because the ownership is not truly community representative hence is not serving the real problems of the community. Genuine community ownership and participation results in engaging inefficient volunteers and professionals who produce programmes without considering the marginalised concerns in society. The ownership problem has also resulted in lack of clear policies and objectives and preclusion of organised publics and groups for community broadcasting.

Tawasul community radio not sustainable

It appears that some innovative funding and operational strategies needs to be outline for the proper operation of community radio to be sustainable otherwise its goal of facilitating development cannot be realised. The sustainability challenges of community radio is confirm by Conrad (2013), who discovered that sustainability challenges of community radio renders its efficiency to question. It was realised that Community Radio in East Africa was sustained through donor funding and other organisational structures. Despite the fact that reliance on donor funding alone has its problems, Tawasul community radio does not have any sustainable source of funding neither is it able to raise adequate revenue to support its operations.

Fraser and Estrada (2001), realizing sustainability challenges of community radio operations have suggested among others that operators of community radio could raise funds through commercial advertising in countries where it is allowed under existing legislations. It also suggested the need for sponsorships, donations, fees for private announcements made over the radio as the people's telephone and membership fees paid by listeners as some of the strategies to raise funds to sustain community radio operations. These notwithstanding, the management and

board of Tawasul community radio must not renege in their effort at sustaining the station by adopting creative legally acceptable means of fund raising for their programmes and activities.

NCA fails to bit

The NCA appears to be lukewarm or derelict duties towards community radio especially the case of Tawasul community radio. The station operates beyond 15 kilometers to reach some of its listeners in faraway Yapei in the Central Gonja district. This is in contravention of the acceptable five (5) kilometer operational limits of community radio radius. The NCA has not been able to stop community radio stations including others in Salaga, Damango, Bole, Kumbungu from exceeding broadcasting beyond their limits. This gives them advantage of broadcasting to many communities and listeners thus losing focus of tackling peculiar community's needs. The NCA hardly visits some of those community radio stations located faraway giving these stations to operate just as their sister commercial counterparts.

Quarmyne (2006), while eulogizing the participatory instrumentality of community radio in local governance and development, also advocated that, "the political space for community radio in Africa needs effective regulatory frameworks and vigilance". This therefore should be a wakeup call on the NCA to carry out their responsibilities effectively by monitoring the activities and programmes of community radio to ensure that they are in conformity with the law and operational guidelines. The National Media Commission (NMC) cannot be excluded from this exercise but can only intervene when the content of the broadcast piece is deemed unprofessional.

Tawasul Community radio gets participation

Radio in general and community radio in particular continue to remain relevant because of the huge number of the listening publics. Many are those who listen and participate in the on-air

programmes. The respondents are emphatic that they participate in through phone-in-segments and text messages. The community entry is another strategy in getting participation where the station broadcasts from a specific community to discuss their developmental challenges. This attracts a lot of people to participate in their programmes. A respondent who listens to the station confirmed that they participate in the programmes of the station especially when issues bothering them are being discussed adding that they enjoy listening to the station during entertainment hours. Another respondent expressed worry of her inability to participate in the programmes through text messaging because she is not able to read and write hence is unable to text.

Faisal and Alhassan (2018), believe that the influx of mobile phones in the country has made it much easier for community-based radio listeners to participate in live studio discussions during programme listening. This new mode of participation they indicate gives satisfaction to listeners who are often able to follow discussions, contribute ideas, clear their doubts and even send greetings to family and friends. Similar high level of participation was found by (Kwode, 2017) where the Simli and Pad community radio stations have set-up listeners clubs in some communities making it easier to identify the audience of those stations and address their needs.

 Mefalopulos and Tufte (2009), argued that participatory communication is an approach based on dialogue, which allows the sharing of information, perceptions and opinions among the various stakeholders and thereby facilitates their empowerment especially for those who are most vulnerable and marginalized. "Participatory communication is not just exchange of information and experiences: It is also the exploration and generation of new knowledge aimed at addressing situations that needs to be improved" (Ibid). It is therefore not out of place to use community radio as a medium to actualize the concept of participatory communication to champion the development needs of the marginalised population.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

This study concludes that Tawasul community radio station appears in operation as a community radio but in reality cannot meet the statutory requirement of a community radio. This is because its ownership as a community radio is problematic. Its communities it professes to serve are not committed to the course of the station though participation in the programmes of the station. Management lacks expertise to raise the station to meet the standards of community radio. A lot more needs to be done including setting up listeners clubs to ensure the station meets a truly community radio station.

This study recommends strict enforcement of the NCA'a regulation in line with community radio operation in Ghana so that the effectiveness and efficiency of community radio would be felt by its beneficiaries especially the rural poor. For community radio to be sustainable, there must be reliable funder or funders to ensure that it is able to meet its operational cost and undertake interesting outdoor programmes tailored to the listening pleasures of its audience. Without adequate funding, its programmes will not be competitive enough to achieve the goals of community radio. Additionally, community radio operators must build a stronger brands and re-brand the concept of community radio to be more innovative in its programmes to sustain its activities based on its unique identity. Beside these, a flat rate advertisement (in consultation with NCA) or announcement should be given to community members to attract revenue and in some circumstances, business owners or community member's voices must be used for the announcement to attract them. License should be given to only credible community members to establish community radio in Ghana. This way, ownership and participation of its programmes would be easier and more so, funding challenges would be addressed through credible ownership.

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