

Chapter 1

Community Radio as a Tool for the Development of the Rural Population of the Northwest Region of Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Community radio as a tool for the development of the rural population of the north west region of Cameroon is aimed at evaluating the contribution of community radios to the development of the region. The focus here is on the conflict-stricken region of the north west region of Cameroon rocked by crises since 2017. Qualitative and quantitative research designs were adopted for this study. The data derived was coded and analyzed to come out with the findings that community radios have significantly contributed to the local development of the region though in crisis in the following ways: improving agricultural activities of the local population, advancing peace and culture, and general sensitization of the population, providing a forum for small and medium-sized enterprises to reach out to the population through advertisements at affordable rates and finally sensitizing the public on health issues focusing on HIV/AIDS prevention, COVID-19, vaccination, and family planning.

INTRODUCTION

According to Koffi Annan, if harnessed effectively, information and communication technologies have the potential to greatly improve our social, economic and cultural lives. It serves as an engine for the development in areas ranging from trade to telemedicine, and from from education to environmental protection. They are tools to advance the course of freedom and democracy.¹ Dissemination, propagation and accessibility of these technologies should therefore be part of a country's development strategy. The

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revolution in ICTs has deep implication for economic and social development of localities. It has pervaded every aspect of human life including health, education, governance, entertainment and economy.

In the present and globalized world, the population of the North West Region particularly in the rural areas of Boyo, Bui, Menchum, Donga-Mantung, Ngoketunjia, Momo and Mezam Division should have access to a range of information to enable them make informed choices concerning their livelihoods, management of resources, community health and development so as to understand and influence the policies and decisions that impact them.

In Cameroon, the rise in the number of non-state radio stations was initially made possible by the signing in 1990 of the Freedom of Social Communication law (Republic of Cameroon, 1990b), and was further enabled by the Decree on Private Audio-Visual Communication Enterprises in 2000 (Republic of Cameroon, 2000a). The possibility for individuals and communities to set up radio stations has given the population an opportunity to diversify its choice of programmes. The trend in Cameroon today is for communities to create radios that can project the issues of their communities and help gain exposure for their difficulties. Community radios are those set up by communities, typically with the assistance of either an international non-government organization (NGO) or a state organ. Such radios are non-profit making. Table 1 indicates the number of radio stations in the North West Region of Cameroon.

Community radio is a type of service that offers a model of broadcasting beyond commercial and public service whose broadcasting serves geographic communities and communities' interest. The content of broadcasting is largely popular and relevant to a local/specific audience, but which might often be overlooked by commercial or mass media broadcasters. These radio stations are operated, owned, and driven by the communities they serve.

They are usually not for profit and provide a mechanism for facilitating individuals, groups and communities to tell diverse stories, to share experiences, and in a media rich world to become active creators and contributors of media. By the core aims and objectives of this model of broadcasting, community radio stations often serve their listeners by offering a variety of content that is not necessarily provided by the larger commercial radio stations. For its proximate location to its

clients, a Community Radio serves a local community of its interest. It is accessible to the community in terms of ownership, decision-making and programme output. In most cases, the community focuses on local concerns and issues. Unlike in the case of mainstream media, rather than merely talking about the community, the people themselves make the programmes. This strengthens local culture with the recognition that this is their station; it becomes a forum for a wide diversity of local opinions and views.

The North West Region is predominantly rural and remote with the main industry being subsistence farming and less than half of the rural population noted to have had formal education. The roads are often impassable during the raining season and very dusty during the dry season. Most of the villages have no constant electricity, no phone lines and low teledensity. Feeling cut off from the world and concerned about social and economic wellbeing of the community, some local councils and communities began community radios in order to bring information and development to its population. This chapter seeks to find out and evaluate the contribution of these community radios to the socio-economic development of the rural areas of the region. The major question therefore, that this work seeks to answer is what are the contributions of the community radios to the development of the rural areas of the North West region of Cameroon?

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