



A Passion for Radio
Radio Waves and Community
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Chapter 4

Lessons from a Little-Known Experience: Radio Candip

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While the struggle for democratisation has proven difficult, profound changes are taking shape in the Central African country of Zaire. Without a doubt, one of the essential tasks within the framework of democratisation, will be popular access to communications – and in particular, radio.

Zaire has seen the emergence of a radio experience which puts the ideal of popular participation into practice. Known as Radio Candip, the project is integrated into a larger framework of development, social economics, and education – not an original concept for African rural radio. However, what sets Radio Candip apart from many such models is its reliance on the local population – radio by or with the people, rather than for the people.

DIALOGUE AND COMMUNICATION

If rural radio stations are to fulfil a role as a modern and supplementary aid to development, the various sectors of the population must be able to participate in the programming and have access to it. Passive listening must be transformed into dialogue and communication.

With this ideal in mind, Radio Candip was established in 1977, as a project of the Centre for Radio Broadcasting and Educational Activities. The Centre is part of the Bunia

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Higher Education Institute, located in northeastern Zaire, a heavily populated region in which one million people live off of agriculture and raising cattle.

Like many rural stations, Radio Candip broadcasts programmes with information intended to help increase production. It also emphasises programming which responds to the questions and needs of its listeners, and encourages people to work together on community projects.

The radio speaks to them in their language, informs them of their duties and rights, gives them advice on how to solve problems they face, and on activities they can develop with their families and in the village. (Pickery, 1987)

Radio Candip's production teams produce programming in seven languages and a variety of programme formats. One of the most interesting of these formats is found in the station's participatory programmes based on material supplied by radio clubs and mini-studios.

RADIO CLUBS

Soon after Radio Candip began broadcasting, the station's personnel promoted the setting up of radio clubs in villages throughout the region. A radio club is a group of people who come together to listen to the radio, discuss its programmes, and move on to action. The clubs often grow out of social or youth movements, are initiated by a dynamic leader, or more simply, by the example of a neighbouring village. They include a diverse presence of social groups, development organisations, and local authorities.

These groups prepare listener reports, audience testimony, and questions, and send them by mail to the station. By February 1987, there were 749 clubs for six language groups: Nandé, Lendu, Alur, Swahili, Lugbara, and Lingala.

Villagers are encouraged to listen to the radio "with their ears, eyes, head and arms;" to understand the programmes; to look around them and compare the radio message to the realities lived; to understand why; to reflect upon their motives and behaviour; and to extend what they hear into concrete actions, solutions to the problems they face.

The radio clubs are also the focal point for audience feedback. They allow the listeners a channel for input into the activities and programming of the station: Are the programmes broadcast responding to the needs of the people? What are their problems and concerns? How can they be addressed by the station?

RADIO CLUB PROJECTS, COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Several types of projects are carried out by members of the radio listening clubs. They can be family or individual achievements dealing with hygiene, vegetable gardens, or fruit trees surrounding a house. Other projects are initiated by all the club's members.

The Ingaa radio club, for example, conducted a campaign to combat the lack of soy seeds. Club members decided to plant two gardens with soy seeds belonging to the club. In their activity report they announced:

The Inгаа radio club is presently reproducing soy seeds, in an effort to share them with other radio clubs and the population during the rainy season. One soy field has already produced a good enough quantity for the next seeding period. Through all of this, we hope to intensify the production and consumption of soy in the Kakwa collective. (Pickery, 1987)

Not all of the radio clubs have been successful – some are intensely active while others seem to be in a continual state of crisis. Among the principal reasons for failure, participants mention; hostility of local authorities; unrealistic projects which are undertaken; corruption by the people in charge of the clubs; lack of follow-through on projects; and jealousy among members. It has also been noted that while the radio clubs help make the relationship between Candip and its listeners more dynamic, their success is restricted by the indirect nature of their access to the station.

MINI-STUDIOS

In 1983, mini-studios were developed in order to enable more direct participation by the population through voice recordings. A mini-studio is, ‘a radio club which operates well, and, due to its central geographic position in relation to other radio clubs, is given a cassette recorder with which its members record voice pieces to send to Bunia, enriching the participatory quality of the programs.’ (Pickery, 1987) Each mini-studio serves a number of radio clubs. In an area with a strong oral tradition and a very high rate of illiteracy, mini-studios facilitate the direct expression of the population, enabling people to speak directly and in their own way on the radio. Ideas, emotions, and feelings are better expressed by voice than by a text read from a letter from the listener, which lacks the original rhythm and intonation. By 1991 there were a total of 143 mini-studios in the region, serving some 90% of the radio clubs.

Setting up a mini-studio only takes place when a set of specific conditions are met. A radio club must prove itself over several years through its development work and through regular correspondence with the station. Further, it must establish a resource base and distribute a minimum of twelve cassettes per year. Each mini-studio which Candip equips with a cassette recorder finds itself confronted with several new questions. Who should be recorded? What should be recorded? How should the recordings be done?

The cassettes sent by the mini-studios to Radio Candip include different styles of recordings which are incorporated into a variety of program formats. One method uses a technique known as “see-judge-act” which involves recording discussions about the major problems in the village. A selection of the comments made during the discussion are then sent to Candip, which produces a complete programme on the subject. A second type of programme incorporates the radio clubs responses to questionnaires sent out by Candip. In another technique the station determines 60 programme topics for a series of shows called *Développement et Femme-famille* (Development and Family-woman). The mini-studios are urged to choose one topic which interests them, and to send in their comments and points of view. Finally, there is a type of programme that incorporates important news events from the villages.

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In addition to interviews, commentaries and reports, the mini-studio contributions include stories, chants, riddles, skits and similar forms that lend themselves well to the art of radio production.

Each of the station's linguistic groups prepares five thirty minute shows each week and the content of these shows comes, in whole or in part, from the letters sent by the radio clubs and the recordings of the ministudios. In one recording a traditional doctor tells of his experience with a sick child and discusses how it is necessary to overcome wrong beliefs and customs in order to improve health. In another, a mother explains how she cured her son from *kwashiorkor* using soya. She is able to talk about this over the radio as she would to her friends, using the language and images of her community. Listeners identify more readily with the concrete examples of their peers that with the theories, generalisations and abstractions of "experts." As a result, they are more likely to put the new-found knowledge into practice. Through the microphones of the ministudios, people are able to express themselves in an authentic manner according to their own traditions, customs and cultures and in their own languages. Through the questions and discussions provoked by this form of communication, people's horizons are broadened. Several years ago, an elderly man voiced the following thoughts:

We used to think that we lived in an unchangeable situation... Thanks to the radio, we've found out that there are many things that can change. Who would have thought ten years ago, that an elderly person could learn to read and write? The radio has led us to see and understand what's happening at our neighbours' and elsewhere in our country and the world.

The radio enables us to see beyond our small village. It's as if we were travelling all around to see how people live elsewhere. That's how we learn that many things can and should change here with us and that we can make them change ourselves by relying on our own abilities.

Before, we didn't have the intention of expressing ourselves... Now, we've learned to speak and to say what we think. The radio has steered us onto this new road by asking that we take part in programmes in our own language. We ourselves ask the questions on the radio.

The radio has opened our eyes, ears, and mouths. (Maréchal, 1982)

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DOCUMENTARY SOURCE MATERIAL

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