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Radio and Rural Development in Swaziland

by Polly E. McLean*

Abstract

This article analyses the application of radio in rural development by non-broadcast professionals in Swaziland. The author discusses (i) the history of radio programming by non-broadcast professionals; (ii) organization and training of non-broadcast professionals; (iii) the relationship between non-broadcast professionals and their audiences; (iv) production processes of development programmes; and (v) topics covered as development programmes. The author concludes that Swaziland needs trained content specialists who understand the audience's technical requirements for programme production.

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La Radio et le Développement Rural au Swaziland

par Polly E. McLean

Résumé

Cet article se penche sur l'application de la radio au développement rural par des professionnels opérant en dehors de la radiodiffusion au Swaziland.

L'auteur passe en revue:

- (i) l'histoire de la programmation au sein de la radio par des professionnels évoluant en dehors de la radiodiffusion;
- (ii) Organisation et formation de ces professionnels;
- (iii) la relation entre ces professionnels et leurs audiences;
- (iv) les processus de production des programmes de développement;
- (v) les thèmes couverts comme programmes de développement.

L'auteur conclut en disant que le Swaziland a besoin d'experts spécialisés dans la rédaction qui comprennent les nécessités techniques de leurs audiences pour une meilleure production des programmes.

Introduction

Over the past several decades, radio has been the medium used most extensively in developing societies as a cost-effective means of providing information and education to diverse target groups (e.g., farmers, rural mothers, illiterates, primary school children) in formal and non-formal education, agriculture, health, family planning, community development and nutrition.

Most radio studies in developing societies have focused on its role in the diffusion of information. Specifically, these studies have concentrated on the use of radio in health-related campaigns (Hornik and Sankar, 1986; Hornik, 1988; Rogers and Storey, 1987), interactive radio instruction (AED, 1985; Friend, *et al.* 1980; Tilson, 1990), radio schools (Spain, *et al.* 1977), radio study groups (Hall and Dodds, 1974; Kincaid, *et al.* 1975) and broadcast development news (Shah, 1988, Barghouti, 1974). However, none of these studies have examined development broadcast programming produced by non-broadcast professionals.¹

This study examines the application of radio in rural development by non-broadcast professionals in the Kingdom of Swaziland and addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the history of radio programming produced by non-broadcast professionals?
2. How are non-broadcast professionals organized and trained?
3. What is the relationship between non-broadcast professionals and their audiences?
4. What is involved in producing development programmes?
5. What topics are covered as development programming?

Development programming is used here to describe educational, instructional or informational radio programmes concerning socio-economic problems based on identifiable audience needs.

Although radio is not a panacea for solving rural development problems nor does it have the capacity to change people's behaviours, there is real evidence that information skillfully disseminated by radio to intended beneficiaries can be an effective tool for creating awareness and promoting consciousness in development areas. Yet those in developing societies charged with implementing radio programmes often are frustrated by a lack of policy guidelines, organizational support and financial and political constraints (McAnany, 1980).

Apart from these constraints, another set of problems arises if (i) messages are not based on identifiable target audience needs and

desires; (ii) messages are not tested for their appropriateness; (iii) audiences are not involved in the development of messages; (iv) there is no dialogue between message designers and audiences, and (v) a mechanism to monitor and solicit feedback, whether formal or informal, is not in place. More recently, Ruijter (1991) has suggested that too much reliance has been placed on the use of radio to disseminate health information because radio ownership is inadequate and the number of working radios are limited among groups at the lower end of the socio-economic scale.

Given the possible constraints and the amount of inputs required to see some results, it is not surprising that audiences have not always responded to well-intentioned information and education efforts via radio. Nonetheless, radio is still the most ideal mass medium available to reach vast segments of the population in developing societies.

Method

The research methods used in this case study were in-depth interviews, participant observations and content analysis. The study analyzed all development programmes broadcast between 1987 and 1990 on the Swaziland Broadcasting and Information Service (SBIS) in accordance with suggested categories developed by Ogan, Fair and Shah (1984).

The percentage of broadcast time devoted to different target groups was determined by calculating the proportion of time for original and repeat broadcasts.

Findings

In this section, the findings are presented for each research question previously posed.

History of Radio Programming by Non-Broadcast Professionals

Swaziland's use of radio as a tool for development began in 1966, the same year the radio station was established, with the introduction of the country's first farm broadcast. This programme, originally produced by a driver in the Ministry of Agriculture, provided information to help the small farmer improve agricultural practices (Skosana, 1989).

From the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, the intervention agencies, both governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) charged with national development, "discovered" radio. These agencies

began assigning content specialists (non-broadcast professionals) to produce radio programmes aimed at informing and educating distinct segments of the rural population. In some instances, sectors within government ministries which had never visualized using radio as a disseminating tool (e.g., Office of the Registrar — Ministry of Justice) began to see the possibilities of communicating information to the general public through this medium. Thus, programmes proliferated. This proliferation can be attributed to such factors as the successful short-term radio campaigns on immunization and oral rehydration therapy conducted in 1983 and 1984, respectively. These campaigns and their subsequent evaluations demonstrated to government that radio was indeed an effective tool in promoting public awareness (Hornik Sankar, 1986).

Equally important, the management of the SBIS felt that they were mandated to use radio to support national development goals, even though the only written policy stemmed from a line which appeared in the 1978–1983 Third National Development Plan. That line said radio should “inform, educate and entertain the people” (1978–1983 Swaziland Third National Development Plan). Thus, the SBIS welcomed these programmes, given their own staff shortages, lack of in-house content specialists required to produce development-related programmes, and the transportation necessary to reach rural areas for production. Also, there are no restrictive policies or charges for securing airtime. Although not formally written, the process is quite simple and does not entail much bureaucratic obstacles. A potential agency simply begins with a formal request to the director of SBIS. This request is then discussed with any of the following staff: the deputy director, public relations officer, head of programmes and the head of the *siSwati* or English channels. The next step is simply finding suitable airtime and providing the producer with basic on-the-job training in radio production (Skosana, 1990).

The importance that the government places on information and development-related programming was evident in the first content analysis of radio programming conducted in 1988. The results indicated that 47 percent of all programmes aired on the *siSwati* channel were information or development-related (McLean, 1988).

How Are Non-State Broadcast Professionals Organized and Trained?

As government and non-governmental organizations began to require radio programmes from staff outside of the broadcast sector, a new radio professional emerged. However, it was not until the early 1980s

that these non-broadcast professionals began to see themselves as a unified body. To distinguish themselves from the state broadcasters, they began to refer to themselves as "development programme producers."

In 1982, 29 of these content specialists, representing six ministries (Health, Agriculture, Education, Commerce, Interior and Justice) and four NGOs (Red Cross, Swaziland National Provident Fund, Save the Children Fund, and the Family Life Association of Swaziland) founded the National Association of Development Programme Producers (NADPP), the first professional media organization in Africa formed by non-broadcast personnel. According to its constitution, this organization was aimed at (i) informing and educating the nation, (ii) organizing and fostering training and development of the NADPP both locally and internationally, and (iii) encouraging members to work, plan and share ideas (NADPP, 1982).

It is important to recognize the significance of the NADPP. First, in order to organize, it had to create a constitution and register with the Ministry of Justice (a requirement for all newly-constituted groups in Swaziland). This first step gave its members some legitimacy in the country and within their own sectors. Second, the leadership expended a tremendous amount of energy pressing the Swazi government for training to develop its members' radio skills, since they were essentially content specialists, not broadcasters.

As a group, the members felt that previous in-country workshops in radio production, sponsored by various donor agencies, did not sufficiently meet their needs. The ministry responsible for broadcasting (Interior and Immigration) did not have the capacity to train the state broadcasters let alone personnel from other ministries. For the most part, the development programme producers learned on-the-job. Because of this, they needed more intensive preparation in producing quality radio programming and developing research skills and message design techniques. This need for training was met in 1985 through a bilateral programme with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

The training programme, under the auspices of the Academy for Educational Development and San Diego State University (SDSU), brought U.S. broadcast faculty to teach three-week courses in six areas: Fundamentals of Radio Production; Advanced Radio Production; Fundamentals of Writing and Journalism; Advanced Radio Script Writing; Development Communication Theory, Practice and Planning, and Research and Evaluation. The programme was spread over 18 months and included post-class activities which occupied the participants until the next course (SDSU/AED, 1985).

This training, along with a new sense of pride, allowed the content specialists to see themselves for the first time as an intersectoral body sharing similar concerns and problems — Development Programme Producers. While training met some of their needs, they still were hampered by a lack of studio facilities at SBIS. In essence, the demand for studio space and technical support to produce development programmes was greater than what SBIS could supply. In many instances, it took all day to produce a 15-minute programme since the development programme producers were often competing with the state broadcasters for the same studio space (Tfwala, 1989).

But the lobbying efforts of the NADPP were so successful that about the same time that their radio training began, two new development communication production studios were installed through the same bilateral efforts responsible for their initial training (USAID/AED, 1984). Since 1989, the training of new producers has been the responsibility of the studio technician assigned by SBIS to the development communication studios. This training is somewhat haphazard but there are continuing discussions about developing a component which would be responsible for training both the state broadcasters and the development programme producers.²

Relationship Between the Non-Broadcast and their Audiences

Field observations indicated that many of the non-broadcast professionals have been able to maintain a bonding relationship with their audiences. In fact, the more popular development programme producers are given the same celebrity status as that of the state broadcasters in the rural areas. Further observations with both groups of broadcasters and with each group separately confirmed a balanced treatment from the audiences. On the whole, rural people were excited to be visited by the broadcasters. They expected to be interviewed for future programmes and asked about particular programmes that were previously aired. They prepared feasts for both groups of broadcasters and gave them several presents.

The relationship between the non-broadcast professional and their audiences took a number of years to develop. Many of the more popular development producers had been producing programmes for at least five years and as a result had built up a loyal radio following. Some of these programmes were allocated prime time listening hours. Training had also enhanced the production quality of their programmes. As a result, a number of these producers used, although not continuously, formats that were appealing and attractive to audiences.

Finally, in many instances, it was discovered that the rural population did not separate the development programme producers as a group distinct from the state broadcasters — as far as the audiences were concerned, the development producers were just radio broadcasters.

The distinction between development radio producer and content specialist has also largely disappeared. Development producers combine their knowledge of the technical requirements needed to bring about a change with the target audiences and their communication expertise. Knowing the comprehension needs of the targets is critical because it gives producers a better understanding of which interventions will or will not work. Furthermore, due to the demands for weekly programming, the development producers find it difficult to depend on content experts from the capital city to facilitate programme discussion. This motivates them to go into the rural areas to collect programme materials, solicit feedback and record the accomplishments of the targets audience in order to integrate them into the radio programmes (Maseko, 1990). In some instances, the intervention agency brings the rural targets to the broadcast facility. For example, the literacy programme, *Sebenta*, provides transportation to bring new graduates to the studio to incorporate their accomplishments into their radio programme.

Gathering programme materials is not done weekly. The general pattern is that producers go into the field to collect materials for several programmes at a time. They also go into the field when a special event with their target audience is occurring or upon request by the intervention agency. Field activities do not always run smoothly for the producers. They are sometimes hampered by the same problems that beset field personnel in other developing countries. For example, transportation is not always available and hardware breakages and software shortages may occur. Although such problems may cause a temporary setback and added frustration for the producers, they are motivated to get the job done because of their commitment to their audiences and their audiences' commitment to them; this is especially evident with those who have undergone intensive training. Each content specialist plans his/her own programming schedule and is held accountable for what is broadcast. In some instances, scripts are reviewed by supervisors. Overall, supervisors informally monitor the broadcast programmes. SBIS management also monitors the programmes in the same informal manner. While SBIS has the ultimate decision on programming, very seldom are programmes censored or arbitrarily removed from the air. However, the major concern of the SBIS management is the extent to which the programmes are culturally appropriate.

Production Process of Development Programmes

Programmes are produced weekly in the two development communication production studios at SBIS. A studio operator, who has been trained to work with these producers, is assigned by SBIS to assist with recording, editing, integrating sound effects and music, maintaining programme quality and preparing the monthly recording schedule.

Each intervention agency is provided weekly with an hour of studio production time. The producers are required to bring to the production facility a prepared script, music selected from the SBIS record library, talent or guests and any pre-recorded materials that they have gathered in the field. To facilitate field recordings, the intervention agencies have provided most of the producers with battery-operated field recorders. Once the programmes are completed, they are deposited in the SBIS library for the continuity announcer's airshift (Mthetwa, 1989).

Programmes are directed to a defined target group. For instance, the Ministry of Commerce targets a programme to the small business community, while the Family Life Association of Swaziland targets a programme to adolescents. The intervention agencies perceive these programmes as a service meant to create awareness and foster a climate of acceptance, particularly for the rural population. In other words, the agencies are generally sold on the idea of using radio as one of several intervention strategies in support of development activities. Although not written with behavioural outcomes in terms of measurable criteria, each development programme producer has a set objective for his/her programme and a defined target group. A typical objective might read "to encourage and promote better child feeding practices."

Programme formats vary and are meant to be instructional and educational. However, most programmes follow a straight informational format delivering a particular message which is introduced by a signature tune and integrated with sound bites from the target group or content experts. But, there are exceptions. Some content specialists are adept at writing and producing typical soap-opera style dramas. An example of this is the AIDS nine-part drama series produced by the Health Education Unit, Ministry of Health (McLean, 1988). For most producers, however, drama formats are the exception rather than the rule.

The typical programme runs for about 15 minutes, although in 1989, SBIS redesigned its programme schedule, cutting some programmes to 10 minutes (Skosana, 1989). All programmes are repeated only once. In essence, each intervention agency is provided

with an average of 80–120 minutes per month of airtime. This puts some pressure on the producer who has other job responsibilities apart from the radio programme. This is probably why the more traditional programme format is used.

Topics Covered as Development Programmes

Data collected in 1990 indicate that there were 21 development programmes produced weekly involving six ministries and four NGOs. All but three programmes were produced in the indigenous language, *siSwati*. About 46 percent were targeted to general audiences; 12 percent to farmers; 8 percent to women; 27 percent to youths (with 9 percent directed to boys and 18 percent to the general youth population); and 7 percent to the self-employed (Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage of Broadcast Time Devoted to Different Audiences for Development Programmes

Audience	Percentage
General	46
Farmers	12
Women	8
Youth (General)	18
Youth (Boys)	9
Self-Employed	7

The general audience category was targeted to both genders. However, producers did target specialized programmes to a specific gender. For example, while community development affects both men and women equally, it was not unusual to find a programme targeted solely to women.

Programmes specifically addressed a number of development areas (Table 2). The largest percentage (27%) of programmes were within youth development and were produced by three organizations: the National Youth Council, the Boy Scouts and the Family Life Association of Swaziland. Placing such a heavy investment in youth programming makes sense, since about 59 percent of the population is under 20 years of age (Report on the Swaziland Population Census, 1986).

Table 2: Percentage of Time Devoted to Different Development Areas

Development Area	Percentage
Health (preventive, childhood, nutrition)	16
Agriculture (small farmer, cooperative farming)	12
Family Planning	4
Economic Development (handicrafts, small businesses)	7
Social Welfare (community development, social security, births and registration, women and development)	18
Education (school management, career guidance, adult literacy)	16
Youth Development (adolescent problems, nation building, youth responsibilities)	27

As shown in Table 2, it appears that the development area given the least attention is family planning. Essentially one NGO is responsible for family planning programmes — the Family Life Association of Swaziland (FLAS). With an annual growth rate estimated at 3.4 percent, family planning is viewed by the government as a critical development area. But it is also an area of development that generates the greatest debate. Given its cultural sensitivity, programmes must be skillfully handled. To overcome some of the cultural barriers, the FLAS producers use formats which the population like most (soap-operas and audience participation) and pay considerable attention to pre-testing and soliciting feedback from audiences. In addition, the producers have been able to secure prime listening hours for airing the programmes.

Strengths of the Swazi Initiative

There are several possible reasons why the use of radio to support development activities is working. First is the nature of Swazi society. Swaziland is the second smallest country in Africa. There are two spoken languages, English and *siSwati*. The population, estimated in

1986 at 681,023 is still bound by Swazi traditional ways of life (Report on the 1986 Swaziland Population Census). Second, the development programme producers are very much like the population they serve and have not severed ties from the rural areas. Like most Swazi who work and reside in urban or peri-urban areas during the week, the producers return to their homesteads in the rural areas on weekends and during leave, planting and harvesting seasons. This movement ensures that the information produced and aired is meaningful to the beneficiaries. Third, apart from the initial investment of a tape recorder and software supplies, this effort is both cost-efficient and cost-effective for the intervention agencies. Fourth, radio is the only mass medium that reaches the rural population. This population speaks *siSwati*. There are no other stations in the region broadcasting in a language that could provide information specifically related to Swaziland's development.³ Fifth, SBIS works with the producers in designing an appropriate programme schedule. Therefore, programmes are broadcast when the targets are most likely to listen. Finally, this is clearly a Swazi effort not hinged on donor agency funding for its origination or continuation, although donor agencies (USAID, CIDA, UNICEF, UNESCO) have provided training support.

Conclusion

The Swaziland case demonstrates that in lieu of a written communication policy, broad sector commitment can generate sufficient interest to focus attention on radio as a tool to support national development strategies. It is this kind of commitment, coupled with demonstrably successful programmes, that is the first step in moving toward a national policy. Also, communication efforts on a national level work best when they are initiated, supported and reinforced from the intervention agencies. For small nations like Swaziland, it makes sense to train content specialists who understand the comprehension needs of their target audiences and the technical requirements needed for programme production. In this way, appropriate development support programming can be plugged into the intervention agency's overall development strategy with in-house personnel right from the beginning.

Notes

1. "Non-broadcast professional" is used here to describe radio producers who are not part of the state sector responsible for programming on the Swaziland Broadcast and Information Service (SBIS).

2. In October 1991, Mswati II, the King of Swaziland, removed the Swaziland Broadcast and Information Service from the Ministry of Interior and Immigration and established the Ministry of Information and Tourism. Removing broadcasting from an obscure position in one ministry and elevating it to ministerial status will undoubtedly have a profound impact, especially in training.
3. Radio Swazi, a South African radio station, is targeted to the siSwati speaking population living in South Africa. Although the language is the same, the information is not relevant to the population living in Swaziland.

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