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The Contribution of Community Radio Programs in Enhancing Economic Development in Zanzibar: Case Study of TUMBATU and MICHEWENI Community Radio Stations

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Abstract

This study analysed the contribution of Tumbatu and Micheweni community radio programs in enhancing economic development in Zanzibar. The study was anchored in Agenda-Setting Theory and the Participatory Communication Model because both theories provide an analytical framework in which the way that media programs shape society and the emphasis is given to what they perceive as most important. A case study design was employed in the study. The population of the study consisted of the Tumbatu and Micheweni communities. The study used a purposive sampling technique to select the two radio stations: Tumbatu and Micheweni community radios. The study used non-probability sampling for those who were readily accessible and willing to participate, which comprised 23 listeners and radio staff and focus groups. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, interviews, focus group discussions, direct observation, and documentary review. Data were analyzed thematically, using Braun and Clarke's form of analysis to enhance credibility. The findings revealed that both radio stations broadcast diverse content to improve livelihoods. Most of the content was about political, cultural, and socio-economic issues. Moreover, the findings showed that community radio supports rural development by addressing local occupational and social needs. Also, the importance of participation was highlighted in the program production, which was achieved through call-ins, listener clubs, and forums. The study concludes that community radios are essential tools for grassroots economic empowerment in Zanzibar and recommends that, given their importance in empowering communities, there should be ways to ensure the sustainability of the radio programs by conducting sustainability and impacts evaluations on specific programs.

Keywords: Community, Community Radio, Economic development, Participation, Empowerment

1. INTRODUCTION

Studies have shown a close link between the media and social and economic development in a given country (Fraser & Estrada, 2001). It is argued that the development of a communication network can be a significant contributor to a country's development. Thus, every country recognizes that growth in the communications sector is necessary for any development plan to succeed. Wasserman, as quoted by Rioba (2012), notes that, even though the government inherited strict laws after independence, mass media still played a vital role in mobilizing citizens and supporting development projects by promoting political ideologies such as national unity, identity, and independence. In remote areas, the government and stakeholders rely on the media to express their views on development projects and programs, such as new farming techniques, the importance of immunization, family planning, and health and hygiene, among others. The media sector also began to change, as Rioba (2008) notes that a meaningful democratic process requires greater mass participation and dedication to raise awareness. Therefore, the need for this kind of democratic process led to the emergence of community radio in Africa during the 1990s (Nyman-Metcalf et al., 2003; Bello & Wilkinson, 2016).

Through radio participation, democracy has had the opportunity to spread to every part of the world through the free process of giving society a voice to express its views and receive diverse ideas. Community radio stations are a public sphere where society and media can collaborate on every aspect of life, based on geographical proximity, shared interests, or similar situations, to address issues affecting people's well-being (Bello & Wilkinson, 2016). Community radio has been established in rural regions where national media coverage is limited. International organizations such as NGOs, UN agencies, and bilateral donors have supported these media by providing equipment, financial assistance, and capacity-building. UNESCO has been involved in various community media studies, initiatives, and seminars over the past few years (Fraser & Estrada, 2001). Community radio has the potential to serve as a bridge between the public and government, facilitating public discourse to identify issues. It can also raise awareness among the underprivileged, marginalized, and poor in rural areas and give them a voice for their unheard agendas.

Homa Bay Community Radio Station, founded in May 1982 in the Western region of Kenya, was the first instance of community radio in the traditional sense (Mtimde et al., 1998). The emergence of community radio in Tanzania and around the world marked the beginning of ownership of the media landscape. According to Rioba (2008), community media in Tanzania is one of the four major patterns of media ownership; the others are public media, private media, and partisan media. Despite the limited written documentation on communication research in Zanzibar compared to mainland Tanzania, community broadcasting services have been identified as one of the categories of content licensed under the Zanzibar Broadcasting Licensing Regulations of 2020. In that manner, community radio has a chance to be nominated and identified.

Community radio services in Zanzibar began in the 2000s, with Micheweni Radio in Northern Pemba and Mtegeani Radio in Southern Unguja launching their services in 2009. These radios received full support from UNESCO when they were established that year but were later granted to the surrounding communities. From there, other community radios were established, including Tumbatu Community Radio in Unguja, Kati Radio in Binguni, and Mkoani Radio in Pemba. Much of the literature has focused on communication development in Tanzania and Africa, but little has been explicitly addressed in Zanzibar; this study therefore provides further insights.

The essence of the problem in this study is that rural communities in developing countries often remain marginalised due to limited access to information, poor participation in developmental processes, and

inadequate communication infrastructure. They are largely excluded from regular discussions about socioeconomic and political progress. This perspective goes beyond the development communication scholars and development communication media theory, which emphasises the important role of mass media in facilitating development in developing countries (Asemah & Edegoh, 2013). The significant role of establishing community radio in Africa is expected to fill the gap that mainstream media have failed to cover. Despite the efforts taken, primary debates have emerged surrounding the Community Media Model, centring on its effectiveness, sustainability, and role in contemporary media landscapes. This contradicts the main reason community radio was established in Africa: to better serve the people where public and state broadcasting have fallen short (Mrutu, 2008). Therefore, this study aims to assess the effectiveness of Tumbatu and Micheweni radios in facilitating economic development in Zanzibar by analysing content, programming, and performances to determine their impact on community development.

2. Research Objective

The objective of this study is to evaluate the contribution of Community Radios programs in promoting economic development in Zanzibar.

3. Theoretical Framework

The researcher used the Agenda Setting Theory and the Participatory Communication Model. This is because both theories provide an analytical framework for this study. The agenda-setting theory examines how media programs shape society, and the emphasis is given to what they perceive as most important. On the other hand, the Participatory Communication Model also shows that getting people involved in programs and the community affects how well those programs work.

3.1. Agenda-Setting Theory

Walter Lippmann was the one who formalized this concept using the term "pseudo-environment", but later Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw popularized this in 1972, and became the founders of this theory (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009, 2011). It offers a pragmatic framework for comprehending how community radios facilitate economic growth in Zanzibar by shaping public priorities and perceptions in their programs and content. The theory suggests that media coverage, framing of the story and the emphasis on their programs affect what audiences consider important and how they interpret the issue (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). In applying to Tumbatu and Micheweni Community Radios, it explains how repeated coverage and program positioning of economic topics such as agriculture, entrepreneurship, fisheries and tourism constructs a media agenda that guides the public agenda, influencing community members' decisions, engagement, and livelihood priorities. Throughout the emphasis and framing of issues, the stations shape how listeners interpret information and act on development opportunities. The stations employ a participatory approach by incorporating interviews, call-ins, and SMS interactions into their broadcast programs. The theory provides a robust lens for examining how community radio facilitates knowledge sharing, empowerment, and local economic mobilization, which aligns directly with the study's objectives.

3.2. The Participatory Communication Model

The model is inspired by Paulo Freire's ideas of dialogue, critical consciousness, empowerment, and collaboration (Selener, 1997). It provides a theoretical framework for understanding how Tumbatu and Micheweni Community Radios empower communities to identify their problems, share knowledge, and take

collective action, thereby contributing to economic development in Zanzibar (Selener, 1997; Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009). By facilitating dialogue through calls, community discussions, and expert interviews, the radios enable residents to engage critically with economic issues, contribute to decision-making, and mobilize local initiatives. This model highlights how participatory approaches promote local ownership, reflective learning, and the integration of cultural knowledge, demonstrating that community radio functions not only as an information source but also as a catalyst for empowerment, collective action, and socio-economic development.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1. Theoretical Literature Review

Community radio is increasingly recognized as a vital communication platform that fosters social connection, drives local development, and enhances the socioeconomic well-being of marginalized communities. Scholars such as Buckley (2011), Mtimde et al. (1998) and Al-Hassan et al. (2011) highlight community radio as an independent station owned and controlled by a community, identified either geographically or by community of interest, with geographic relevance which distinguishes it from commercial broadcasting. These perspectives are directly relevant to the Tumbatu and Micheweni Radios, which are defined within the geographic communities of Northern Unguja, specifically Tumbatu and Northern Pemba, specifically Micheweni and serve the economic interests of farmers, fishers, and small-scale entrepreneurs. Many scholars compromised with its feature in accessibility function, participation and engagement, empowerment, ownership and control, non-profit orientation, editorial independence, voluntarism and local focus (Mtimde et al., 1998; Fraser & Estrada, 2001; Berrigan, 1979; Fogg et al., 2005; Tucker, 2013; Gaynor & O'Brien, 2011). Programming is among the ways the community participates in the running of the community radio. A different agenda can be set, whether from the radio or from the community itself. This makes Agenda-Setting Theory very applicable in this study, as supported by Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009), who state that community radio not only allows audiences to receive messages but also to influence programme agendas and decision-making processes.

In Tanzania, where radio remains the most accessible medium, community stations play an essential role in disseminating information on agriculture, fisheries, entrepreneurship, and public services. Throughout radio programmes, the unheard voices can be amplified. Because of using oral communication format and its accessibility and affordability, community radio is still effective in rural and low-resource environments (Nyamwaya & Mberia, 2021). Participatory communication is the main principle that community media uses. Community media organizing programs and content through the engagement process, which further enhances democratic involvement and ownership.

In support of UNESCO's effort, developing nations have established different measures to support rural community development. The government has introduced national policies, regulatory frameworks, and political environments to sustain community media by licensing them and governing. Foundations have been made across Africa through different reforms influenced by global communication rights frameworks such as the Windhoek Declaration of 1991 and the African Charter on Broadcasting of 2001. However, the sector continues to encounter persistent barriers. Regulatory uncertainty, weak technical capacity, and government interference undermine the ability of community radios to operate independently across Africa. Tanzania reflects this challenge clearly, as its centralized and politically shaped licensing framework restricts genuine community ownership and editorial freedom (Mpehongwa, 2023). In Tanzania, regulatory bodies,

such as TCRA for Tanzania and the Zanzibar Broadcasting Commission for Zanzibar, are responsible for classifying and licensing media. Despite those efforts, autonomy, transparency, and fairness have become very challenging. Therefore, communication scholars and policymakers urged actions taken to protect editorial independence and enhance sustainability. They suggested that community media stand as a participatory democratic tool and a development-oriented communication platform.

4.2. Empirical Literature Review

Communication development scholars show that community relevance and localization of program content have strongly shaped the developmental impact on the community. For example, Sada (2022) found that Sidama Radio devoted about 80% of its programming to local issues such as education, culture, agriculture, health, and governance, thereby improving community knowledge and decision-making. Sanni's (2013) study also shows that radio programmes play a meaningful role in building people's economic skills by offering practical, easy-to-apply information that helps improve everyday livelihoods, whether in farming, small business management, vocational work, or accessing market opportunities. Scholars also continue to stress the importance of sharing local content on community radio, as Nyman-Metcalf et al. (2003) recommend that community media should broadcast at least 40% of its programs locally to ensure cultural relevance and preservation, different from the commercial, which requires local content to be at least 25% average. These show that the effectiveness of community radio in promoting development stems from its structural, local, and relevant content within the given community.

Studies across Africa show that community radio programs have been identified as producing tangible economic and livelihood benefits by strengthening communication, supporting small businesses, and enhancing access to critical information. For example, Al-hassan et al. (2011) examined the case of Simli Radio in Ghana and found that affordable advertising enhances their local business. They can advertise at a low cost compared to commercial media, and their sales have got a boost. The local herbalist entrepreneur said daily sales have increased by up to 90% from affordable advertising. Similarly, in Kenya, Nyamwaya and Mberia (2021) showed that 77.78% of farmers were aware of the important role played by Kisima Community Radio in maize production. Throughout the agricultural programs aired on Kisima radio, farmers have increased their knowledge of planting techniques, market prices, and farming innovations, which have increased their yields and income levels. However, the impacts of community radio depend on the mediating variable performance; sometimes, its developmental impacts are not guaranteed, as they depend on the environment and political situation. Findings by Mohammed (2018) indicate that when stations fail to uphold participatory principles or address local needs, as in the case of Waghimra Community Radio, where over 60% of respondents were not satisfied with the radio, they fail to adequately address local development challenges, demonstrating how poor engagement or externally oriented content can limit community empowerment.

5. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore how Micheweni and Tumbatu Community Radio programs contribute to local economic development in Zanzibar. A qualitative design enabled the generation of rich, contextualised insights into participants' experiences and radio practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The two stations were purposively selected as information-rich cases due to their active involvement in community empowerment and locally relevant economic programming (Anduvate, 2014; Patton, 2002). A qualitative case study enables the researcher to gather detailed insights into the mechanisms and

processes through which radio programs influence livelihoods, a goal that quantitative or survey methods cannot fully address. The study focused on the communities served by Micheweni and Tumbatu Community Radios, including radio listeners and presenters who are the most affected in one way or another, as these groups are directly involved in or affected by radio programming (Creswell, 2012).

This study employed a non-probability sampling strategy, specifically convenience sampling, to select participants who were readily accessible and willing to participate. Non-probability sampling is commonly used in qualitative research and case study designs. According to Creswell (2012), participants in this method are selected based on their availability and willingness, making it suitable for studies constrained by limited time and resources. The sampling frame included key stakeholders, radio listeners identified through the radio stations' databases, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and the radio staff. The study sample was bounded within specific geographic areas relevant to the case study, which are Tumbatu and Micheweni. The sample comprised 23 participants from the radio staff, listeners, and community members, selected through convenience sampling based on availability and engagement. This geographic bounding was used to strengthen the connection between the case study, and propositions, ensuring that data collection remained focused on the phenomenon under investigation (Yin, 2018). The researcher gathered data through semi-structured interviews with the Manager, Director, Administrative Officer, and presenters of two stations; Key Informant Interviews specific to active radio listeners; Focus group discussion with JAMII SACCOS members; Direct observation; and documentary review, allowing for triangulation and enhancing credibility (Patton, 2002).

Thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke (2023) was used to code, categorise, and develop themes from the data, ensuring analytical rigour and alignment with the study objective. The study employed thematic analysis to analyse qualitative data, guided by the research questions and specific study objective. The researcher followed a systematic sequence of data analysis of familiarisation, organisation and coding, theme development, review and refinement process and systematic presentation and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2023; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2002).

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1. Results

The study has assessed the contributions of Tumbatu and Micheweni community radio programs to boosting economic development in Zanzibar. The findings reveal that, despite having specific programs to improve economic growth, others, such as entertainment, news, and information, also make a significant contribution to improving their living standards through the engagement forms they use. The participatory approach allows the community to select topics for discussion according to their preferences, thereby establishing an agenda. Apart from their studio content, outreach programs represent another method of using these radios. For instance, Salam Clubs groups, the JAMII SACCOS group, and soap-making groups, economic help in improvements of Tumbatu and Micheweni communities is seen through the support of these groups. The content analysis of Micheweni and Tumbatu radios yielded the results displayed in the table below.

Table 1: Weekly Contents Types in Tumbatu and Micheweni Community Radios

Content Types	TUMBATU Community Radio		MICHEWENI Community Radio	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
News and Information	11	21.5%	50	25.9%
Economic development	9	17.6%	58	30%
Sports and Entertainment	25	49%	52	26.9%
Religion issues	6	11.7%	26	13.4%
Advertisements	0	0	7	3.6%
Total	51	100%	193	100%

Source: Field data (2025)

Table 1 highlights the differences in programming priorities between Tumbatu and Micheweni Community Radios. While Tumbatu Radio dedicates nearly half its programming to sports and entertainment, Micheweni Radio prioritises economic and news content, reflecting a deliberate approach to advance community development and financial literacy, contrasting with Tumbatu's audience-centred entertainment strategy.

6.2. Discussion

The findings show that Tumbatu and Micheweni Community Radios contribute to economic development through different content programs, whose priorities are set by those programs. Despite the existence of many programs with various themes, they can be categorised into news and information programs, economic development programs, sports and entertainment programs, religious programs, and advertising programs. In the program-wise priorities, much emphasis is given to economic programs, which account for 30% of all programs in Micheweni, a high number compared to Tumbatu radio station, which has about 17%, and other kinds of programs, like sports and entertainment, which make up a large number. Although there is little content on the economic development menu programs, it does not suggest that Tumbatu Radio has not done anything to improve the community's livelihood, because it has introduced community outreach programs facilitated by programs aired. One of the beneficiaries of that project makes clear, for example, that the Tumbatu's soap-making project, introduced by SOS, originated from a radio program addressing women's land rights challenges. NGOs such as SOS, TAMWA, ZMBF, AMREF, FCS, and the Milele Foundation had introduced different economic and well-being projects to improve the standard of living of the Tumbatu community through cooperation with the Tumbatu radio. Such projects include soap-making, health awareness, and civic education, which have had tangible impacts on economic well-being, such as paying school fees, buying school materials for their child, and meeting household demands. This aligns with the argument by Manyozo (2012) that the developmental impact of community radio depends not merely on its presence, but on the nature and relevance of its programing.

The programs such as "Mada Mezani, Mtaani Kwetu, Jicho la Leo", and "Ujumbe wa Asubuhi" on Micheweni radio and "Tuwajibike, Mazingira, Ijuwe Afya Yako, Mwanamke Jitambue, Harakati za Vijana, Mwamko kwa Jamii, Ongea Redio Programu", and "Tuambizane" for Tumbatu are critical because they offer actionable guidance on agriculture and fishing, entrepreneurship insights, awareness of market trends, financial literacy messages, civic education, health and environmental knowledge. These programs concern the specific topic in

which the community participates by calling in or sending SMS. This supports Freire's (1970) argument that dialogic communication through call-ins, discussions, and expert interviews empowers communities to take informed decisions that transform their conditions. During the discussion, one of the Tumbatu listener-farmers demonstrated this link by explaining how a radio expert's advice reshaped his agricultural planting timetable and his decision to plant anything on rocky land, especially during the rainy season. Similarly, the small merchant and food vendor in Micheweni shared that using live greetings programs and Salam Club meetings expanded her customer base, enabling her to sell "urojo", "chips", and "ubuyu" to clients across the Northern region of Pemba.

Despite their strengths, both stations running economic development programs rely on external support, which jeopardises their sustainability. Development content often relies on external experts and NGO funding, which limits continuity, as the Tumbatu radio leader makes clear that the program can be postponed or repeated when a guest is missed. Distance from urban centres complicates the logistics of inviting expert guests. Some programs are repeated due to resource shortages, as some are produced outside the studio. These challenges reflect broader African evidence that community radios struggle financially, affecting their ability to maintain consistent development programing (Jallof, 2012).

During these programs the topic of the program is selected by the community itself according to their priorities and their local language format, which makes Agenda-Setting Theory and the Participatory Communication Model very applicable to the Micheweni and Tumbatu communities because a strong emphasis is placed on their choice of what the agenda should be, as Servaes (2008) emphasises communication for development becomes effective only when messages use culturally rooted languages and symbols familiar to the audience. The agenda-setting function is also supported by the participatory communication model, which is implemented through dialogue in which the community participates in discussions about programs.

7. CONCLUSION

Generally, the Tumbatu and Micheweni community radio programs have made a great contribution to economic empowerment in the Tumbatu and Micheweni communities. The study contributes to understanding broad scholarly debates in development communication and positioning community radio as a tool for grassroots information sharing and local economic empowerment. Their empowerment is due to the accessible ways for sharing livelihood skills, market information and entrepreneurship knowledge. Their media becomes a participatory platform in which communication practices, such as call-ins, listener clubs, and community-driven content, ensure the programs observe local needs to solve their economic problems. The Tumbatu and Micheweni community radios support income generation by mobilising communities to form groups, promote financial literacy, establish cooperatives, SACCOS, Salam Clubs, and small-scale enterprises. In this study, agenda-setting theory and the participatory communication model were interpreted differently because the community served as the source for establishing their agenda through the engagement methods created by these stations, which empower them to solve their problems. This means that communities become core creators of the development process. However, the sustainability of these radios becomes a major challenge because most of the economic programs, such as development content and outreach programs, depend on external support, which makes the failure of the programs or postponement of the scenario a possibility. These highlight the need for stronger institutional and policy support to safeguard their long-term community impact.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study demonstrates that Tumbatu and Micheweni Community Radios play a significant role in fostering economic development through development-oriented content and participatory communication approaches. However, several critical knowledge gaps remain. Based on the findings, the following areas can be observed: -

Evaluations of the long-term sustainability of radio programs and content are necessary. The study found that community radio has played a significant role in empowering communities through its programs. Their empowerment includes mobilising in group formation and supporting the provision of financial literacy and entrepreneurship training. However, many of these programs and projects face challenges over long-term sustainability because they depend on external support. Therefore, we should go in-depth to evaluate the issue and the structural, financial, and institutional factors.

The researcher also recommends conducting impact evaluations of specific program. This study evaluated the overall developmental impacts of community radio programs, rather than assessing individual program. In order to understand the real impacts, future research should evaluate the specific programs' themes, for example, agriculture, health, business tourism, fishing, women empowerment, and youth empowerment, to determine the yields of the most successful and significant economic and social results.

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