

The Political Economy of Indigenous Local Media for Minority Languages in Zimbabwe: A Case of Lyeja FM Community Radio

Journal of Asian and African Studies

1–13

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DOI: 10.1177/00219096231160233

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Abstract

This article analyses the political economy of indigenous language media for minority ethnolinguistic groups in Zimbabwe. Using political economy as theory, the study engaged members of Lyeja-Nyai Development Trust to analyse socio-cultural and political challenges for Lyeja FM community radio of the Nambya and Dombe/Tonga ethnic groups in a multilingual community of Hwange. The findings of the study show that Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) licensed community radio stations through local or ethnic non-governmental organisations and these ethnic non-governmental organisations determined indigenous language programmes for community radio broadcasting. The article argues that local communities should be custodians of their own community radio broadcasting.

Keywords

Indigenous language media, minority ethnic groups, Nambya, Dombe, political economy

Introduction

Language in African media reflects the inclusion or the exclusion of ethnolinguistic groups in the public sphere (Mabwezara and Strelitz, 2010; Ndlovu, 2011; Oso, 2006; Pelinka, 2007; Salawu, 2021). Usually, languages spoken by major ethnic groups enjoy more coverage in the indigenous language media than languages spoken by minority groups (Ndlovu, 2011; Oso, 2006). For instance, South Africa has Zulu language, Nigeria has Hausa or Yoruba and Zimbabwe has Shona or Ndebele as dominant languages and these have been enjoying more coverage in the African media. Since 1980, Shona and Ndebele have had more coverage in the Zimbabwean media despite the existence a variety of indigenous languages by ethnolinguistic groups. Likewise, there have not been significant studies on minority indigenous languages due to their lack of exclusive media coverage. Community radio licensing in 2021, prompted the objective of this study to investigate the political economy of minority indigenous language media in Zimbabwe.

This article investigates the socio-political and economic challenges for indigenous minority language media and unpacks the political economy of Lyeja community radio in Zimbabwe.

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Community radio redistributes ‘power of communication by advocating for groups that are socially and politically marginalised or oppressed, the right to a fair share of resources so as to take control of their own lives’ (De Beer, 1998: 163). Some scholars, however, argue that the demographic size of the people speaking the language of the media determines the success of the indigenous language media (Ndlovu, 2011; Salawu, 2021). Using Lyeja FM as a case study, this article probes into the cultural demographic size of ethnic groups and political inclinations that influence the success of indigenous language media. Lyeja-Nyai Development Trust (LNDDT) was granted a community radio broadcasting licence for Lyeja FM 107.3 in March 2021, but the radio station started broadcasting in December 2022.

LNDDT is a local non-governmental organisation that presides over Lyeja FM community radio in the district called Hwange. Hwange is a multilingual community in the Matabeleland North Province of Zimbabwe and consists of several ethnolinguistic groups, such as the Nambya, Dombe/Tonga,¹ Chewa, Nyanja, Ndebele and Lozi. The Nambya and the Dombe/Tonga are viewed as the original indigenous ethnic groups in Hwange. However, due to human mobility for economic reasons, there have been an inflow of dominant indigenous language groups, namely, Ndebele and Shona. Hence, Lyeja FM offers minority linguistic groups an opportunity to celebrate their indigeneity in such a multilingual community.

Community radio and indigenous languages in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe is largely rural and has had limited broadcasting media since 1980. Zimbabwe Broadcasting Cooperation (ZBC) controls national television station (ZTV) and several radio stations, such as the National FM, Khulumani FM, Power FM, Radio Zimbabwe and Classic 263. National FM, formerly known as Radio 4, broadcasts in 14 indigenous languages with Shona and Ndebele as dominant languages (Dube and Wozniak, 2021a; Mabika and Salawu, 2014). In 2018, Khulumani FM, known as KFM 95.0 was introduced as a provincial radio station in Bulawayo and broadcasts in English, Ndebele, Xhosa, Kalanga, Venda, Sotho and Tonga (Ndlovu, 2018). Ndebele gets more airtime on Khulumani FM while Kalanga, Venda, Sotho and Tonga get limited time (Dube and Wozniak, 2021b). Radio Zimbabwe, formerly known as Radio 2, broadcasts only in Ndebele and Shona yet state-controlled radio is taxpayer funded by all ethnolinguistic groups.

Between 2015 and 2018, the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) licensed a number of commercial radio stations. In 2022, Zimbabwe had 10 licensed commercial radio stations, namely, Skyz Metro FM, Khulumani FM, Breeze FM, YAFM, Capitalk 100.4 FM, Hevoi FM, Diamond FM, Nyaminyami FM, 95.8 Central Radio and 98.4 Midlands. Unlike community radio, commercial radio broadcasting is sustained by private funders and is generally driven by commercial goals. The licensing of commercial radio in Zimbabwe was perceived as somehow biased because most commercial radio stations are owned by ruling party elites (Masuku, 2011; Moyo, 2004). This article argues that unlike public (state-controlled) and private commercial media, community radio broadcasting promotes cultural independence of local minority indigenous ethnolinguistic groups. Indigenous language media has the capacity to enhance media diversity and positive perception for ethnolinguistic groups (Motsaathebe, 2018).

Community radio augments multiculturalism, particularly in Africa where there are a variety of ethnolinguistic groups and overcomes communication barriers, such as illiteracy, poverty and lingual diversity (Mano, 2012). Community radio has more resonance with local life and popular culture, and serves the needs of indigenous communities for community development purposes (Mano, 2012). From 2021, the government of Zimbabwe promoted cultural diversity through the

Table 1. Community radio stations in Zimbabwe (2022).

Name of community radio	Area
Ntepe-Manama CRT	Manama Gwanda
Lyeja FM	Hwange
Ingganga FM	Mbembesi
Radio Bukalanga	Plumtree
Bayethe FM	Matobo
Beitbridge-Shashe CRT	Beitbridge
Twasumpuka FM	Binga
Nyangani FM	Nyanga
Avuxeni FM	Chiredzi
Chimanimani CRT	Chimanimani
Vemuganga CRT	Chipingo
Ndau CRT	Mahenye (Garahwa)
Kasambabezi FM	Kariba
Madziva FM	

Shamva

Source: Authors.

licensing of community radio broadcasting. In 2022, Zimbabwe had 14 licensed community radio stations. Table 1 shows licensed community radio stations across the country.

Community radio broadcasting is essentially defined by its unique characteristics. This type of broadcasting is very different from commercial and public broadcasting. Perhaps, the main characteristic of community broadcasting is the fact that it is not intended for profit-making (De Beer, 1998; Fourie, 2001). Community radio broadcasting involves members of the community as producers, managers, journalists and the audience (Muswede, 2009). It functions as the community's voice and its services are more independent than profitable. This means community radio broadcasting services are controlled and administered by the local people. Leketanyane et al. (2021: 50) posit that 'community radio programming is designed to reflect the specific interests and needs of the community it serves'.

A community radio station serves a geographic community in which the content is more specific (Girard, 2007). It can serve community interest of a people not necessarily in the same geographical location. The distinctive characteristic of community broadcasting is that programmes are participatory in nature to promote a horizontal communication between groups and individuals for the purpose of open debates (Megwa, 2007). Programmes have a serial approach with an autonomous continuity of topics and with constant evaluation appeals to the needs of the audiences (see Megwa, 2007). Most staff of community radio broadcasting are volunteers, and only a few works as paid employees (Mmusi, 2002).

Most of African community radio stations function in poverty-stricken areas and experience financial constraints (Megwa, 2007). Community radio broadcasting survives on donations from well-wishers, government, local and international non-governmental organisations (De Beer, 1998; Fourie, 2001). There is less of advertising revenue for community radio broadcasting because most advertisers go for competitive media (De Beer, 1998; Fourie, 2001). However, donor funding has a certain impact on the impartiality and independence of community broadcasting (Motsaathebe, 2022), especially in Zimbabwe where there are restrictive media laws and control by the government. This article, therefore, grapples with the question: how does community radio ensure its independence and impartiality if it is mainly funded by the government or non-governmental

organisations? We interrogate the organisational, financial as well as the political implications within the political economy of Lyeja FM community radio.

LNDT and Lyeja FM

BAZ perceived community radio licensing as the only way to promote linguistic and cultural rejuvenation in Zimbabwe (Ncube and Ncube, 2021). Thus, local non-governmental organisations were granted licences for community radio broadcasting and these were Radio Bukalanga (Pvt) Ltd (Bulilima), Matobo Community Radio Trust, Twasumpuka Community Radio Trust, Mbembesi Development Trust (broadcasting as Ingqanga FM), Ntepe Manama Community Radio Trust, Shashe Community Radio Broadcasting Association and LNDT (broadcasting as Lyeja FM) (Ncube and Ncube, 2021). The challenge is that Zimbabwe has more than 16 indigenous languages thereby making it problematic for one community radio station to accommodate all minority languages in a multilingual community. Hwange has more than six indigenous languages, and with only one community radio, Lyeja FM. This article argues that at least a community radio station should be able cover all indigenous languages in a specific multilingual geographical area or there must be more community radio stations to cater for every minority language. The intricacy of this study is that community radio stations were licensed through local non-governmental organisations registered as Trusts. Although the licensing of community radio stations gave minority language groups an opportunity to recuperate their indigenous languages that were on the verge of extinction (Ncube and Ncube, 2021), control by non-governmental organisation challenges what may entail as community radio.

LNDT was registered on the 4 May 2019. Its Notarial Deed of Trust describes LNDT as a non-governmental and non-profit-making humanitarian organisation dedicated to the advancement and development of the quality of life of the people of Hwange. Every year, the organisation holds an annual general meeting for leadership renewal. Although membership is open to every local person through subscription, the organogram of the organisation has a firm board of trustees. Culturally, LNDT is Nambya dominant, in that way affecting participation by other ethnic groups, such as Dombe/Tonga, Nyanja, Lozi and Ndebele.

Lyeja is a Nambya adverb meaning ‘it is dawn’. Lyeja FM aims to foster community development through broadcasting in indigenous languages, namely, Nambya, Dombe and Ndebele. As indicated, the challenge is Hwange has other local minority languages, namely, Chewa, Nyanja and Lozi that are not in the scope of Lyeja FM broadcasting. Figure 1 shows a visual description of Lyeja FM. Hwange is largely rural and is occupied by minority ethnolinguistic groups.

In the early stages of community radio licensing, local non-governmental organisations called for financial support highlighting the socio-economic challenges within their geographical areas. In August 2022, the station manager for Lyeja FM, Munyandi noted that

once government provides the broadcasting equipment it will be easy to start broadcasting. Definitely, we will meet the deadline as BAZ has already given us the frequency. The Trust has also set up a management team that will oversee day-to-day operations of the station. (Ncube and Ncube, 2021)

This means BAZ donated studio equipment to community radio stations. As aforementioned, donor funding, especially from government has certain political implications that cannot be ignored in the analysis of media political economy. Therefore, it is in the interest of this article to explore the political economy of indigenous language media for minority languages, using Lyeja FM as a case study.



Figure 1. Facebook profile of the Lyeja FM community radio.

Political economy of indigenous language media

The concept of political economy in media studies refers to power relations between media owners, politicians and interested groups able to influence the production, distribution and consumption of media content (Duncan, 2014; Merrill, 1997; Mosco, 2009; Wasko, 2005). The political economy theory of the media discusses how funders, such as government, non-governmental organisations and interested groups or individuals direct some funding to support a certain agenda (Murdock and Golding, 1995). Literature on media ownership and state control in Zimbabwe highlights repressive media laws (Mathe, 2020a, 2020b). In 2000, 2001 and 2002, the government of Zimbabwe enacted suppressive media and security laws to prohibit unregistered media from publishing and to regulate the publishing of ‘classified information’. Some of the laws include the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) No. 2 of 2000, the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) No. 3 of 2001 and the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) No. 1 of 2002. In October 2020, the cabinet of Zimbabwe reflected on amending Criminal Law (Codification and Reform Act) into what they call the ‘Patriotic Bill’ to criminalise citizens opposing the government, conniving, or cooperating with foreign governments and involving themselves in foreign relations for self-gain causing damage to national interest. The draft proposal of the Patriotic Bill attempts to shrink the democratic space, freedom of association and expression. It is against this background that this article analyses community radio broadcasting for minority languages in Zimbabwe.

Although reflecting unique cultural encounters, the political economy of indigenous language media is not immune from the prickles of media laws. Oso (2006) notes that indigenous language media faces challenges centred on resource allocation, power and class functions in relation to the demographic size of indigenous ethnolinguistic groups. Usually, the larger the ethnic group the better the access to economic resources and power relations within the polity (Nnoli, 1980). This

means there is a link between the demographic size of an ethnolinguistic group and the economic potential of that group. Scholars argue that economic power is usually determined by income levels and cultural assertiveness by an ethnolinguistic group (Ndlovu, 2011; Salawu, 2021). Media corporations are also interested in audiences' economic potential (Ndlovu, 2011: 270). In reference to Zulu people in South Africa, Ndlovu (2011: 270) notes that

The Zulu group is supported because of the growing middle class and the urbanisation taking place in KwaZulu Natal (KZN). While Afrikaans consumers are exploited in terms of their buying power, the Zulu audience is seen as 'aspirational'.

Using South Africa and Nigeria as case studies, Salawu (2021: 3) argues that the larger the size of the ethnic group the higher the chances of success for the indigenous language media. Indigenous language media face fiscal challenges based on three factors, 'the number of people who speak the newspaper's local language, the power equation and resource allocation, and the ability of the newspaper to cater to the tastes of youths and urban elites in terms of language use and content' (Salawu, 2021: 6).

Ndlovu (2011: 278) notes that Zulu language media in South Africa has success because of 'the pride which AmaZulu have for their language and the sheer size of the Zulu-speaking market'. Zulu language is a widely spoken indigenous language followed by isiXhosa. Zulu as the mother tongue is spoken by 22,7%, isiXhosa (16,0%), Afrikaans (13,5%), English (9,6%), Sepedi (9,1%), Setswana (8,0%), Sesotho (7,6%), Xitsonga (4,5), SiSwati (2,5%), Tshivenda (2,4%) and IsiNdebele (2,1%). Being the most spoken language by the South African population, almost about 50% understand Zulu nationwide (Ndlovu, 2011: 279). In the province of KwaZulu Natal alone, 80% are Zulu-speaking with 21.5% in Gauteng province and 24.4% in Mpumalanga (Ndlovu, 2011). Zimbabwe has almost 13 million Shona speaking people grouped in different dialects, such as Karanga, Zezuru, Manyika, Ndau and Korekore, and all are called by the umbrella name, Shona (Moyo and Mathe, 2014). The Ndebele speaking people who are the second largest group, are pegged at 3 million.

Salawu (2021: 3) argues that 'it is not just the number of speakers of a language that matters; the cultural assertiveness of its speakers also goes a long way in determining it as a language in the public domain'. Cultural assertiveness is the pride people have about their language and cultural values. Ndlovu (2011: 1) writes that

Zulu media outlets, in political and cultural terms, are currently relatively dominant because of the historical pride of the AmaZulu (Zulu people) towards Zulu (the language) . . . In cultural-economic terms, Zulu media outlets are rising because of the comparatively larger number of Zulu-speaking people in the South African linguistics.

In Nigeria, Hausa and Yoruba are dominant in the indigenous language media landscape. Salawu (2006: 10) notes that minority languages, such as Igbo language in Nigeria do not have much cultural assertiveness and newspapers in Igbo are not that exciting compared with Hausa and Yoruba.

Looking at what Ndlovu (2011: 269) calls 'commercialisation of identity and language' as shown by Comaroff and Comaroff (2009), media corporations tend to promote languages spoken by larger ethnic groups for profit-making purposes. In the past 20 years, media corporations in South Africa have supported language groups with a historical demographic characteristic of larger audiences and growing income levels. Ndlovu (2011: 270) notes that

media corporations targeting Zulu media consumers . . . support Zulu because of the bigger numbers of Zulu speakers/media consumers, compared to other individual black ethnic groups. The Zulu group is also supported because of the size of its youth audience, its growing middle class and the urbanisation place in KZN.

For commercial reasons, media corporations go for indigenous language media with a larger audience. Salawu (2021: 6) argues that with calculated commercial risk, media corporations strategically,

set up new 'traditional' (radio and newspapers) and new 'digital online media platforms among those groups that, despite globalisation and the persistent hegemony of English, still take strong historical, futuristic, political and cultural pride in their languages'.

In this article, we focus on the survival of indigenous language media for minority languages in Zimbabwe, giving more attention to Nambya and Dombe of Zambezi valley in Hwange. The article takes into consideration the demographic size of Nambya and Dombe language speakers, the cultural-economic environment, the ethnic power relations and the economic capacity to run an indigenous language media.

Methodology

This study qualitatively employed a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix 1) to dialogue with 10 members of LNDT. The spokesperson, the secretary and the station manager of Lyeja FM and other several board members were also interviewed. Interviews were carried out telephonically between June 2022 and August 2022. We collected individual perspectives to analyse the cultural demographic size of ethnic groups, sources of funding and political implications for Lyeja FM community radio broadcasting. Qualitative research is 'rooted in a phenomenological paradigm which holds that reality is socially constructed through individual or collective definitions of the situation' (Firestone, 1987: 17).

This study used Lyeja community radio as a case study for minority indigenous language media in Zimbabwe. We purposively focused on Lyeja community radio because there is a research gap on minority indigenous language media for the Nambya- and Dombe-speaking people in Zimbabwe. As researchers, we had a convenient ethnographic involvement with the community under study. Data were thematically analysed and some identities were kept anonymous and confidential.

Findings

The findings of the study show that the political economy of the indigenous language media consists of power relations between the media owners and the ruling government, ethnic groups and other sources of funding. Government's political interference has always been through media laws that limit freedom of expression (see Mathe, 2020a, 2020b). Scholars have shown that sources of funding and demographics of ethnic groups do influence the production, distribution and consumption of media content (Duncan, 2014; Merrill, 1997; Mosco, 2009; Motsaathebe, 2013, 2022; Murdock and Golding, 1995; Wasko, 2005). Hence, this article employs the concept of political economy to examine the socio-cultural economics of indigenous language media in the context of Zimbabwe with specific reference to Lyeja FM community radio. The perusal of the empirical data for this study yielded the following themes: ethnic non-governmental organisations, fiscal challenges and the influence of BAZ, and the exclusion of ordinary local communities from the decision-making process.

Ethnic non-governmental organisations

Literature shows that community radio stations were licensed under the guidance of local non-governmental organisations. This article argues that local representation by non-governmental organisations is problematic for community radio broadcasting, especially in a multilingual community where one ethnolinguistic group can exercise monopoly over another. In the case of Lyeja FM, Nambya enjoys more coverage, followed by Dombe and Ndebele yet Hwange has other languages, such as Njanja and Lozi. We further found that ethnic differences in Hwange frustrate equal community participation. Participants noted that other ethnolinguistic groups felt excluded from Lyeja community radio broadcasting and labelled the station as pro-Nambya.

Lyeja FM was licensed in March 2021 but only started broadcasting in December 2022. The station manager noted that the delay in radio broadcasting was caused by sluggish response from local people, business companies and community leaders because of ethnic differences. The research findings show local people had differences over the name 'Lyeja' because they wanted Hwange FM to encompass all Hwange ethnic groups. The findings confirm Salawu's (2021) assertion that power relations between the ethnic groups in a multilingual community obstruct or advance the success indigenous language media. One of the members of LNDDT grumbled that

Dombe/Tonga, Njanja and Lozi were at the forefront of making sure Lyeja does not have a licence. They took BAZ to court objecting the granting of a broadcast licence. Nambya will have more airtime on Lyeja FM just as Ndebele enjoys the same on Breeze FM.

On another note, literature has shown that the government of Zimbabwe has a tendency of offering licences to pro-government individuals or groups to control the production and content consumption by publics (Masuku, 2011; Moyo, 2004). We are of the opinion that the licensing of community radio through non-governmental organisation somehow gave government a certain influence over these organisations.

Besides community radio broadcasting should not be at the mercy of a local non-governmental organisations. The characteristics of community radio broadcasting reflect that local people must participate as producers, managers, journalists and the audience (De Beer, 1998; Fourie, 2001; Mmusi, 2002; Muswede, 2009) and must be custodians of their own community radio. The findings of the study indicate that there was competition between Lyeja FM and Hwange FM during the application for a community radio broadcasting licence. Disgruntled pro-Hwange FM minorities began to sabotage the licensed pro-Nambya, Lyeja FM community radio through litigation, arguing that Hwange FM has a better community approach than Lyeja FM. Other participants argued that Hwange is divided between the unlicensed Hwange FM and the licensed Lyeja FM because 'Hwange FM was pro-local and Lyeja was pro-tribe but got licensed because it was organised by people aligned to the ruling party'. The context of Hwange FM and Lyeja FM reflects the influence of class relations between the ruling elites and ethnic groups as shown by Salawu (2021) that the power equation determines the success of indigenous language media. Hwange FM assumed to be more heterogeneous and somehow inclined towards opposition politics was denied a community radio licence.

Some participants wondered how Lyeja FM got licensed ahead of Hwange FM, as shown by the comments below:

How do you get a licence without anything in the first place, why did not they rally behind Hwange FM.

There was no community buy-in for that Lyeja FM station. The community knew about Hwange FM and from nowhere Lyeja FM got the licence.

The licensing of Lyeja FM was described as a political strategy to advance Nambya hegemony in Hwange. A member of LNDT argued that Nambya-speaking people are indigenous in Hwange and are the only ethnic group with relevant chiefs, hence the need for a Nambya community radio. He further commented that

All licensed community radio stations in Matabeleland are aligned to tribes and the primary aim is to promote previously marginalised ethnicities, Kalanga, Venda, Tonga, Tshangani, Bharwe and Suthu and these have their own community radio.

This article notes that ethnic differences had a negative impact on Lyeja FM community radio. We argue that indigenous language media in a multilingual community should cover all languages or there must be more community radio stations to cater for each ethnolinguistic group. Community radio broadcasting should be owned and controlled by communities. Effective local participation should benefit community radio broadcasting and there must be less dependence on external funding.

Fiscal challenges and the influence of BAZ

The findings of the study show that Lyeja FM was dependent on government, non-governmental organisations and individual well-wishers for funding. Most community radio stations received studio equipment from BAZ. Given the political situation in Zimbabwe, this article argues that licensing of community radio stations through non-governmental organisations and donation of studio equipment by BAZ reflect some political intrusion into the independence of community radio broadcasting. Murdock and Golding (1995) have shown that government and media funders can channel funds to influence an agenda. We, therefore, argue that given the repressive media laws and state control of the media in Zimbabwe, the licensing of community radio broadcasting represents efforts by BAZ to inspire positive perception towards the government. A participant noted that the economy in Zimbabwe is unstable, and therefore, it will be challenging for minorities to sponsor their own media. In the initial development stages of Lyeja FM, the secretary and station manager noted that

As Hwange community, we are expected to air before December 2022 lest we lose our licence. This is a big development that we as a community must receive with both hands. We have applied for a disused building in Hwange which we have taken upon ourselves as a community to renovate it. So far, we have managed 8 × 114 roofing timber and renovated 3 rooms. We have so far received \$104USD in total we used to buy timber.

We need to have a proper building to house the equipment and we are the next to get equipment that will be coming soon. We got a building from Hwange Colliery Company (HCC) but it needs refurbishment seriously.

We have a crisis like now BAZ is ready with equipment as soon as the building is done on renovations.

The Secretary of Lyeja FM highlighted that funding was also received from local and international well-wishers. He added that international funding involves local people in diaspora because Zimbabwe depends on diaspora remittances. The findings of the study show that at first, BAZ was opposed to diaspora funding but changed policy upon realisation that community radio broadcasting was dependent on diaspora funding. The Secretary of Lyeja FM noted that

BAZ once insisted that we should not receive funding from diaspora but they later allowed the diaspora to fund when we argued that we have local people in diaspora and are part of Hwange community.

As a regulating body, BAZ regulates sources of funding for community radio broadcasting. This article argues BAZ's first disapproval of diaspora fund was an attempt to safeguard political interests for the ruling party because BAZ donated studio equipment.

The findings of the study show that there was less funding from local business companies. The spokesperson of Lyeja FM highlighted that support from business companies was insignificant. Ndlovu (2011) has reflected that media corporations tend to support languages spoken by major ethnic groups with a larger audience for profit-making purposes. Around November 2022, Lyeja FM secretary complained that

We were hoping that local companies will fulfil their promises but up to now nothing have been received from them, so we have continued with individual contributions.

I just feel that the Member Parliament as well should show much commitment to this as this is part of the development they always preach about. Their contributions should be significant. But we tried to request some share of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and we did not win.

The lack of support from politicians was attributed to ethnic differences and poor collaboration between ethnic groups. Thus, the dissonance among ethnic groups in Hwange affected the initial success of Lyeja FM. From onset, there were no public consultations, as shown by the findings that Lyeja FM was not well known among community members. This means there was exclusion of ordinary locals from the decision-making process.

Exclusion of ordinary local in the decision-making

The organogram of LNDDT shows that the organisation depends on membership subscription. This means unsubscribed members have limited participation in the decision-making process. This article argues that the licensing of community radio broadcasting through local non-governmental organisations restricted full community participation by other ethnolinguistic groups. The spokesperson of Lyeja community radio noted that local people had a lack of understanding on what entails community radio broadcasting. Lyeja spokesperson added that local people should be educated about community radio broadcasting.

From that vantage point, this article argues that LNDDT has the mandate to put the community at the centre of Lyeja FM broadcasting. Megwa (2007) shows that community radio broadcasting should promote horizontal communication between groups and individuals to stimulate open and free debates for local cultural diversity. This article argues that there was supposed to be community consultation on what type of community radio broadcasting locals need. Local people were supposed to be involved in the decision-making especially in determining the name and programming of the community radio.

We argue that community participation is always needed for the success of community radio broadcasting and LNDDT has the duty to unify the community or all ethnic groups in Hwange. Salawu (2021) backs this argument by stressing that better class relations (in this case, ethnic relations) determine the success of indigenous language media in a multilingual community. There is, therefore, a need for public consultation and continuous assessment of programmes to meet the needs of local audiences because community radio broadcasting should be participatory.

Conclusion

This article concludes that the political economy of indigenous language media consist of power relations between ethnolinguistic groups, government and non-governmental organisations. These aspects are embedded within media ownership and control to influence the production and distribution of media content. The findings have shown that Lyeja FM operates within a multilingual community where ethnic differences are common. Dominant with Nambya ethnolinguistic group, community participation by other ethnic groups becomes limited. As an indigenous language media, Lyeja FM is challenged by lack of participation from non-Nambya ethnic groups. We recommend that there must be more community radio stations to cater for each ethnic group. On the other hand, we argue that allowing non-governmental organisations to run community radio stations frustrates the nitty-gritties of community radio broadcasting.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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Note

1. We use Tonga and Dombe interchangeably because Dombe is considered a dialect of Tonga.

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Appendix I

Semi-structured interview guide

- (a) When did you get licensed and what are the challenges so far?
- (b) How is the community response given that Hwange is multilingual?
- (c) How do you ensure community participation given that a non-governmental organisation presiding over Lyeja FM?
- (d) When are you receiving equipment from BAZ?
- (e) Are ethnic differences an impediment?
- (f) In what languages are you going to broadcast?
- (g) Other languages are they not going to feel left out?
- (h) When are you starting the broadcasting?