

MISA Media Literacy Workshop

Title: The Role of the Public in Media Development

Host: Solwezi Community Media Association (Socoma)

Venue: Changa Changa Motel, Solwezi

Duration: 119-23 November, 2006

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Topic: The Historical Perspective of the Media in Zambia

!. Introduction

The media is older than man. The media simply means the medium of communication. Communication tool or methods include the spoken word (common language), common signs and symbols.

Man is a unique species on earth. S/he dominates the world because of the ability to communicate and exchange information important for survival.. To communicate to each other, the human being has developed various channels and these are the mediums of communication. The mediums of communication are the media – spoken, written, audio (sound) or visual (seen). All these media use the word as the basic ingredient in the transmission of information from sender to received and back (feedback).

The key words about media are:

- Word
- Information
- Language
- Communication
- Medium

2. “In the beginning”

How come the media was there before man? Zambia being a so called “Christian nation”, we use the Bible version of creation.

According to Genesis 1:3, God used the spoken medium to create the world thus, “Let there be light.....” In the ten steps of the creation story, man’s creation comes ninth on the sixth day before God rested on the seventh day.

It is not clear who he speaking to, but using what we have come to know as words, he was communicating to someone in a common language using the medium of speech. The Bible further states that “In the beginning, the word. The word was with God. The word was God.” Some interpret the “Word” to mean God’s only begotten child, Jesus Christ. In any case, God said “Let us make man in our own image, after

our likeness....” So he was obviously communicating this information to someone using the medium of speech. The media (medium) therefore preceded man.

What ever religion one belongs to, all believe in the existence of the “Supreme Being”, “Creator of Heaven and Earth”, “Our Father”. Every tribe, language, or race have a term for God, whether Lesa, Nzambi/Njambi, Kalunga, Mulimu, Chauta or Mwami. We all are God’s creation. Through Him, we communicate with each other using the media he gave us.

The media is therefore the plural word meaning the various means of communication we use to interact with each other. Through this exchange of information, man was advance himself to the extent that it is recognised we are living in the Information Era” in the “Global Village”.

3. Communication revolution

Today, we stand on the threshold of an exciting era in the history of humankind. It is the information era. Information is now the engine of the world, in man’s quest for survival on this God given Earth.

As the world has advance, the task of communication has become ever more complex – to contribute to the liberation of humankind from want, oppression and fear and to unite it in community and communion, solidarity and understanding.

The collection, storage, processing and dissemination of news, data, images (pictures), facts, messages, opinion and comment required in order to understand and reach knowledgeably, to personal environmental, national and international conditions as well as to be in a position to take appropriate decision.

This socialisation provides a common fund of knowledge, which enables people to operate as effective members of the society in which they live and which fosters social cohesion and awareness thereby permitting active involvement in public life.

In pursuit of these goals, the information era has come about because of the technological and scientific advances being made in the communications sector which have revolutionised the world. Information is at the cutting edge of new discoveries that man has become wholly dependent on information providers like the media.

The world has now become one “Information Village” We can communicate and interact with any part of the world instantaneously using modern “information Communication Technology” (ICT), such as the Internet, through computers, satellite communication and other gadgets. We can see and hear things happening thousands of kilometres away on the other side of the world in the twinkling of an eye just as we know what is happening in or own village, hence the term “Information Global Village”.

The media is at the forefront of the information revolution.

Humankind, in its quest to understand itself, its past, present and future, is even probing deep into space in search of contact with other possible life. In search of a new home to escape to when this world comes to an end. Scientists have estimated that the earth will be consumed by the sun and self destruct in five billion year from now. That is why they are worried about the Ozone layer, which is being destroyed. The Ozone layer shields the earth from the dangerous radiations of the sun and thus protects life on earth. Now holes are being made in the layer because of man's carelessness.

So, man is using information communication technology to find out if other planets like Mars can sustain life. As we speak, a spacecraft Genesis, has left out galaxy or universe and is hurtling towards the Sun on a 20 million kilometres long that will take three years, in order to determine how the Sun and the universe were created – whether through the Biblical version or the scientific “Big Bang” theory.

Information is being gathered by scientists through such space probes as Genesis, Pioneer and others, as well as through powerful telescopes like the Hubble which is station 400 kilometres above the earth, sending back detailed pictures of what exists in the outer space; All this information is being gathered using information communication technology.

The media is therefore at the cutting edge of these scientific breakthroughs designed for man's survival.

4. **Media Evolution**

The media has evolved as man has progressed. About 35,000 years ago, we communicated through rock painting and drawings. Although today, Africa is left behind in the information revolution, it is however takes the pride of place as the origin of the written medium – Egyptian civilisation pioneered the media revolution. Through Egyptian hieroglyphs written on a reed called papyrus (where the word paper originates), we can read how the ancient Africans lived and died – the voice from the past that possesses the magical power of language.

At 1,000 year, humankind used drums and smoke signal to communicate. By 2,000 – s/he used radio waves and began to search into deep space. By 3000 years, s/he will communicate across time into the future and the distant past, all thanks to ICT, using the tool of the media.

5. **The Zambian media**

As earlier stated, the media is interwoven with our lives – our history, background, culture, customs and tradition, our hopes, aspiration and our trials and tribulations.

Zambia too has had its traditional media recording our existence in life, who we are, who our ancestors were, where we came from, what we believe in, what our hopes are, and so on., We have our own mediums of expression therefore we have a traditional media, although we are losing it gradually with so called modernisation or westernisation.

Not being an island, Zambia caught up with the rest of the world and the western media was introduced into our lives – the missionaries introduced the bible and therefore the medium of books. Eventually other media, such as newspapers, radio and television were introduced and are with us today. Even the new media such as the Internet and mobile phone technologies are here.

The history of what can be termed as western media is only as old as colonialism in Zambia, which was not long.

Radio and newspaper have been the main media in Zambia. The colonial government heavily used both for political purposes. This has been the case too since independence.

a. Print media

The first published newspaper were the Livingstone Mail and the Livingstone Pioneer in 1906. Livingstone then was the capital of North-western Rhodesia and therefore the seat of the colonial government, hence the newspapers being based there.

The colonial government produced its own publication, mainly meant to convey its message to the local population. Vernacular publications such as Inshila and Mutende were some of these publications.

The new Zambian government inherited this colonial mentality of using the media for propaganda and was publishing six newspapers for the provinces to propagate its programmes.

These were Imbila (Bemba – 27,000 circulation) Itanda (Tonga – 7,000), Liseli (Lozi – 8,700), Luikanga (Bemba/Lenja – 6,500), Ngoma (Kaonde/Lunda/Luvale – 3,000) and Tsopano (Nyanja – 12,000). The interesting thing is that these circulation figures are much higher than most publications today can claim when in fact the population has grown. Is it a matter of economics or growing illiteracy?

In the run up to independence, the main newspapers were the Northern News (Times of Zambia) owned by the Argus news group with strong ties to the mining industry and the colonial government; and the Central African Mail (Zambia Daily Mail), owned by white liberals sympathetic to the African nationalist cause.

To consolidate its power, the new black government acquired the friendly Mail and in time President Kaunda reached a pact with the new owners of the Times, Lohnro, for him to be appointing editors. Kaunda was a friend of Lohnro Czar Tiny Rowland. Eventually, in 1982, the Times was acquired completely by the government and became a tool of the ruling UNIP's "Party and government – PIG) regime.

The print media was therefore dominated by the state media until the 1990-91 revolution which brought the one party state to an end. The lone voice was the church sponsored National Mirror, which fought for issues affecting the poor and was unpopular with the powers that be. After this came the emergence of private newspapers such as the Express and the Weekly Post, which spearheaded the campaign for politician change. Since then, many private newspapers have sprang up, most of which have since closed shop.

b. Electronic media (Radio/TV)

Broadcasting in Zambia has long been the preserve of the government since colonial times. It is only after the return to multiparty politics in 1991 that the airwaves were liberalised. This has seen the proliferation of private and church owned community radio stations all over the country. Otherwise, the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation held the solo franchise for broadcasting in Zambia.

Today, apart from several commercial and religious stations being on the air, there also private television stations such as Muvi and Mobi in Lusaka, the Pentecostal Trinity Broadcasting Network (TBN) and the pay station Multichoice (M-Net) and Casat.

The first broadcast in Zambia was made in 1941, thanks to the Second World War. The British colonial government began first to broadcast from 1939 on the Copperbelt twice a week relaying broadcasts from the British Empire Broadcasting (London Calling).

With the outbreak of the war with German in Europe, Britain saw its colonial possessions in southern Africa as being endangered by the presence of German in German East Africa (Tanganyika-Tanzania) and German Southwest Africa (Namibia). Lusaka Radio therefore came on the air in 1941 for the purposes of anti-German propaganda, especially that Hitler has the support of the Boers in South Africa.

In peacetime, Lusaka Radio continues to propagate the colonial governments interests to rule the natives. When independence came, the black government used it as a tool to consolidate its rule and the building of a One Zambia One Nation. The wars of liberation in the neighbouring states and the instability in the Congo also encouraged the Kaunda government to utilise radio as a national sovereignty tool.

The first television broadcast was made in 1966 in Kitwe, again by the mining interests. However, with independence, the station was transferred to the seat of power in Lusaka, to be effectively controlled as a state owned media.

The seven main vernacular languages are used on the state owned and controlled ZNBC – Bemba, Nyanja, Lozi, Tonga, Lunda, Luvale and Kaonde. Ironically, except Kaonde, these were the languages also used by the colonial authorities. Attempts by other language groups to be accommodated also have so far proved futile.

6. Conclusion

One thing, which is very obvious about the Zambian media is that it is very political. Like Zambian politics, it is not issue based. It mainly reports on personalities and politicians. Issues that affect the every day life of the Zambian people are covered as a by the way.

The circulation or outreach of this so called national media is also negligible. The biggest circulation of any newspapers is not more than 20,000 copies and the only national radio and TV station, ZNBC can only reach three million listeners and viewers in the country with a population of 11.3 million. The coverage of the media both in terms of news, events and issues as well as being accessed by the people is very poor. The much vaunted free flow of and access to information as a people's right, is therefore poor also.

For this reason, Zambia does not have a rural media or a people centred media. Almost all the media organisations are based in the urban centres, especially the capital. What happens in rural Zambia is only reflected if it is sensational or political.

As a consequence, Rural Zambia is denied the basic right to information. The information revolution is passing them by as a result, rural Zambians have the tragedy of being doubly illiterate – unable to read and write and computer illiterate.

While other human beings are searching for life in the outer space in order to preserve the life on earth, the majority of the people of Zambia, who are in the rural areas still wallow in ignorance, disease and poverty. The media in Zambia is therefore doing an injustice to the people. They are failing to perform their prime function of informing, educating, enlightening and entertaining.

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