

**THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN PROMOTING “ELDERLY WOMEN’S RIGHT TO LIFE” IN TANZANIA: AN EVALUATION OF “HAKI ZA BINADAMU” PROGRAM AT RADIO SAUT**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The focus of this study was to explore the roles played by media, particularly community radios in promoting the rights to life of elderly women in Tanzania. Specifically, the study evaluated the “haki za binadamu program” aired by radio SAUT FM in Nyamagana, Mwanza region. The evaluation concentrated on two areas: One, it evaluated the accessibility and listenership of the program and two it evaluated the success of the program in promoting the rights of elderly women in the district. This is a qualitative research which used purposive and snowball sampling techniques to select the respondents. A total of 27 respondents were involved in the study, they included; three police officers from the gender desk in Nyamagana police station, five local leaders, six journalists who are specialized in human rights reporting, and 13 respondents from families of elderly women who were reported to have been killed due to witchcraft accusations. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect the data for this study. Thematic analysis was used to analysis the data gotten from the field. The findings suggest that the accessibility and listenership of haki za binadamu program in Nyamagana district was very poor. It was also found that haki za binadamu program has not played any noticeable contributions in promoting the rights to life to the elderly women in Nyamagana district.*

**KEYWORDS:** role, media, promoting, elderly women’s right to life, evaluation, Haki za Binadamu.

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## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Human Rights and the Killing of Elderly Women in Tanzania Abuse of elderly women's right to life in Tanzania is one of the most reported cases related to the violation of human rights in the country. There have been a number of reported cases in the country involving the killing of innocent elderly women in the country. One of the most pronounced causes of the killing of elderly women in Tanzania is said to be associated with ignorance, beliefs of superstition, and witchcrafts.

According to LHRC (2009), it was estimated that between 2010 and 2015 about 2,585 elderly women were killed in eight regions of Tanzania mainland. This is one of the biggest numbers to be reported in the country. Surprisingly, most of these killings are done by very close relatives and family members, including couples of the diseased. For example, in April 2017, a man named Kumaliya Kondolo Basu, resident of Solwe village of Kwimba district in Mwanza region was arrested by Police for killing his own wife in belief of witchcraft practice (LHRC, 2017). This is just one amongst other examples of couples especially husbands being involved in the killings of their wives. Elderly women with red eyes have enormously been killed in Tanzania because of the allegations of being witches.

According to the Daily News (August 16, 2015), the killing of elderly women with red eyes in the lake zone was still one of the major violation of human rights in the country. It was reported by the Police through the regional Staff Officer Mr. Japhet Lusingu that it had arrested hundreds of culprits who were alleged to have been engaged in the killing of elderly women with red eyes whom they associated them with witchcraft practices. According to the Help Age International (2010), about 3000 elderly women of whom most of them were believed to be with red eyes were brutally killed by unknown killers in Tanzania because of witchcraft beliefs.

The most affected areas with these killings included the regions in the lake zone, covering the Shinyanga, Mwanza, Tabora, Geita, and Simiyu regions. The implications here is that the Sukuma ethnic group who are the majority in the country and they live almost in the listed regions are the leading ethnic group in the country engaging in such killings of innocent elderly women. Miguel (2005) confirms that witchcraft beliefs in Tanzania is highly reflected and practiced among the Sukuma ethnicity in the lake zone. Miguel (2005) explains that because of their being majority in

the country, most of the Sukuma people still follow the traditional religions which mostly it has been a cause of witchcraft accusation in the region. Apart from the traditional beliefs amongst the Sukuma, Miguel adds that the traditional or local security council commonly known as *Sungusungu* amongst the Sukuma have been one of the causers and killing of elderly women accused of witchcraft in the region.

### **Human Rights and the killing of Elderly Women across the World**

The killing of innocent elderly women accused of witchcraft is not only practiced in Tanzania but it is spread almost in all African countries. The accusation and killings of elderly women in the Sub-Saharan African is very rampant compared to their counterpart men. It is reported (Eboiyehi, 2017) that elderly women in Africa accused of witchcraft have continued to be victims of gender based violence against women in the region despite the diverse efforts in protecting the rights of women.

According to Chilimampunga and Thindwa (2011), Sub-Saharan African countries are dominated by diverse belief system; including the existence and powers of witches which is said to be infiltrated in every segment of the societies. Eboiyehi (2017) reports that the recent statistics show that thousands of elderly women accused of witchcraft have been killed in Sub-Saharan Africa while others have been buried alive, burned into ashes, hacked to pieces and tortured to death. For example, In Zimbabwe, about 50 elderly women were hacked to death between 2010 and 2011 because of witchcraft accusations. In Bukina Faso, the killing of elderly women accused of being witches is also reported (HAI, 2010) to be significantly very high. It is reported that hundreds of elderly women across Bukina Faso were hacked, tortured and killed while other fled their homes and communities due to witchcraft accusation. This is very surprising to witness in this twenty first century to continue seeing such killings of innocent persons just because of unproven accusations of witchcraft. Perhaps it is the right time to make this war to be termed as an international disaster whereby all stakeholders across the world should make it as one of their priorities in their daily operations.

Likewise, Nigeria and Ghana are also amongst the Sub-Saharan African countries which have witnessed significant reported cases on the killing of elderly women because of similar grounds of

witchcraft. It is reported (Igwe, 2011) that about 1,000 elderly women alleged to be witches were killed in the northern part of Ghana while in Nigeria similar number of elderly women were also tortured and others were killed. This statistics imply that the killing of innocent elderly women in the Sub-Saharan African still exist at a very high level. The statistics also continues to confirm that there is still some ignorance amongst community members in the Sub-Saharan African because there is no yet any scientific evidence to prove that witchcraft can only be practiced by elderly women and not any other groups of people such as elderly men.

Furthermore, Kluitse (2012) adds that in Ghana, the belief in witchcraft is significantly spread across the country whereby persons who are labeled as witches and wizards are believed to possess the so called supernatural powers which enable them to create or cause misfortunes in the communities. Other supernatural powers associated with witchcraft is considered to have power to cause sickness, inability to have children, destruction of property and other misfortunes believed to have been cause because of witchcraft. Additionally, Kluitse (2012) explains that elderly women who are accused of witchcraft in Ghana are usually banished from their homes and communities by a group of community members and sometimes they are banished by their close relatives, including their husbands and their own children and family members.

Miguel (2005) reports that most of the witches in the Sub-Saharan Africa are considered to be females and are reflected to use their supernatural powers to inflict harm to other members of the community and sometimes to their immediate relatives or families. This implies that most of the accused witches in African are not only killed by people who are not close to them but they are also killed by their immediate family members, including their loved ones like their siblings or their own children. However, Miguel (2005) reports that there were hundreds of reported cases in Andean regions of South America where thousands of indigenous communities were reported to have punished hundreds of people suspected to be witches. Miguel further explains that apart from punishing or killing persons accused of witchcraft, communities in South America do abandon infant twins or babies born handicapped, as well as old people because they considered them to be burdens, Miguel adds that diverse attacks to people accused of witchcraft is widely documented in this region.

In Europe, the killing of persons, including elderly women is also reported to be very rampant across Europe. Miguel (2005) confirms that there were about 40,000 individuals who were been killed in Europe between 16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> century. Miguel explains that majority of the people who were killed during that time were elderly women, often widows. The author (Miguel) further says that despite the presence of diverse oppositions from government and human rights activists in Europe, the killing of elderly women accused of witchcraft continue to be reported in the continent where the killings are concentrated in the poor and agrarian areas. Likewise, Miguel (2005) says that low temperature and other weather changes are some of other aspects linked to witchcraft beliefs in Europe. He explains that occasional low temperature which reduced crop harvests was often an immediate cause of witchcraft allegation and the killing of elderly women in Europe and North America.

### **“*Haki za Binadamu*” Program**

The literary meaning for *haki za binadamu* is “human rights”. As such, this program was introduced by Radio SAUT FM as a program responsible with the protections of human rights in the lake zone regions of Mwanza, Geita, and Simiyu. Because of the vast number of reported cases on the killing of elderly women in the country, in 2006 the *haki za binadamu* program was introduced with specific focus of protecting the rights of elderly women especially those who were killed because of the accusations of witchcrafts. The introduction of this program went hand in hand with the establishment of the *haki za binadamu* center [Human Rights Centre] at St Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) with a purpose of easy coordination between the program and the center.

One of the prime factors which led the management of St Augustine University (SAUT) to launch the *haki za binadamu* program and *haki za binadamu* center was due to the frequency killings of elderly women in Mwanza. Thus, both the program and the center were designed to play two major roles of; providing education and legal rights to the victims. The program concentrated on education programs while the center focused on the legal aspect. The program also concentrates in creating awareness on the importance of building peace and tranquility in their communities by saying no to the killing of innocent elderly women in the regions while the center has continue to provide legal counseling to the victims. Among broadcasting techniques used by the program

includes both pre-recorded and live weekly human rights radio platforms as a way of addressing the killing of elderly women in the regions. In the case of live sessions, individuals are invited in the radio studio where they are given platforms of educating listeners about the rights of elderly women in the regions. As such, listeners do have opportunities to give out their opinions and contributions through telephoning direct to the presenters in the studio. This approach of communication has played significant contributions in eliminating the killing of elderly women in the regions. It is estimated that since the establishment of *haki za binadamu* program, the number of elderly women killed with accusation of witchcraft has reduced from about 30% in 2006 to about 9% in 2018. This is a credible contribution of *haki za binadamu* program.

### **The Role of Media in Mitigating the Violations of Human Rights**

The role of the media in protecting human rights across the world is one of the *bonafide* rights advocated across countries. Historically, it is considered that these roles of the media were first declared by the United Nations in mid 1940s in Afghanistan. It was during that time when the United Nations for the first time consulted *Zma* (in Kandahar) and *Bost* in (Helmand) radio stations to support the UN tasks in restoring and preaching peace as well as advocating the protection of human rights in Afghanistan. With the series of program contents aired by the two radio stations in Afghanistan, the natives were able to access information and also air their views about how they would prefer their State to handle the previous state of insecurity.

There are number of studies on the role of the media regarding human rights issues. Many scholars (Bosl and Diescho, 2009) find the media to have a role to play in human rights violations especially when they argue on the power of the media to inform the authorities such as the law enforcers and, policy makers to take necessary action for recourse. When the media publicize hidden violence against vulnerable groups like the elderly women to the point that makes respective authority to act, it is sufficient to regard the media's role for this purpose. Nwanko (2011) studied about the role played by broadcasting media to expose organized human rights violations in two West African Countries namely *Ivory Coast* and *Ghana*. The study presents an interesting case of a human rights issue whereby cocoa dealers got involved in both, child trafficking and child labor both being illegal business under public international law.

One of the best ways through which the media can help in promoting human rights agenda across the world is through its publicity and broadcast power. The media can disseminate human rights information, mobilize human rights, strengthen popular participation in civil society, promote tolerance, and shine a light on government activity (Apodaca, 2007). Furthermore, Matumaini (2009) maintains that an entertainment-educative program strategy can attract more audience if compared to other program strategies. He gives an example of *Twende na Wakati* program of *TBC-Taifa* in Tanzania and the way it succeeded in combating HIV/AIDS epidemic and enhanced family planning in Tanzania. The program uses entertainment-educative strategy which, according to Matumaini (2009) is considered to be an approach appropriate for development education whereby other media can use that approach to promote human rights agenda. The success of the program seems to depend on a combination of the selection of themes, relation to audience culture, storylines, character development, scriptwriters, actors, music and its methodological structure. The media can set a human rights agenda to influence the people in different aspect say to perceive the elderly women as vulnerable who need support from the society including assurance of their security. When such content become often and repeatedly addressed by the media, the attitude of the people are more likely to change.

Likewise, the media can also serve as powerful instruments for violence mitigation but also as sources of violence and thus lead to the breach of human rights (Frohardt and Temin, 2007 as cited by Nwanko, 2011). For example, the Rwanda Genocide in 1994 is a typical case of where the media were involved in perpetrating hatred and violence among ethnic groups in Rwanda, as such, the media became the major source of the genocide and violations of human rights especially women and children. However, in countries where the media have positively been used, they have played significant and credible roles in promoting and protecting the rights of citizens especially the marginalized groups. In India for example, “Tinka Tinka Sukh” radio is one of the most success radio program which focuses on issues of women’s rights, including their rights to life. The program also discusses other issues such as gender equality and access to properties to the women (Singhal & Rogers, 1999 as quoted by Lopez-Steele, 2011). Furthermore, this program is reported to be one of the most sources of information to most of the women and other activists engaged with the protections of women’s rights in India.



In Nigeria, the role of the media has also not gone unnoticed, it is reported that the “*bakete family*” is one of the radio show which is advocated and used to propagate the rights of women in Nigeria. This program is broadcasted six days in a week and it brings together all human rights stakeholders and other human rights well-wishers who are allowed to participate in the productions of the contents of the program. Moreover, the role of the media in promoting humans’ rights has been reported to be highly pronounced in Sudan whereby the media have accredited for promoting human rights and peace building in the region. It is confirmed that Miraya radio is one of the radio stations in that region which has successful played a green light towards building and protecting rights of the marginalized groups, including elderly women (UNMIS, 2006).

### ***Research Questions***

- I. *To what extent do the residences of Nyamaga district get access and listen to Haki za Binadamu program?*
- II. *To what extent has “haki za binadamu” program succeeded to promote the rights of elderly women in Nyamagana district?*

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This is a qualitative research. This approach was considered suitable to be used because of its vast range of garnering insights and detailed information regarding sensitive issues related to the violation of the rights of elderly women in Tanzania. In order to garner appropriate and relevant information regarding this study; the police, local government officials, residences of Nyamagana district, and journalists were the target population. As such, the study collected data from a total of 27 respondents; covering three police officers from the gender desk in Nyamagana police station, five local leaders, six journalists who are specialized in human rights reporting, and 13 respondents from families of elderly women who were killed. Purposefully sampling technique was used to select the police officers, local government leaders, and journalists because of the nature of their works. Whereas snowball sampling technique was used to reach the 13 informants whose relatives (elderly women) had been killed or had witnessed when the killings were happening. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect the data. In-depth interviews were used to collect data from the government local leaders, police officers, and



journalists. Whereas one focus group discussion was conducted with the other respondents<sup>13</sup>. Thematic analysis was used to analysis the data gotten from the. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is the best in scrutinizing and reporting patterns and themes within qualitative data, thus, the choice of this data analysis method was considered suitable and relevant for this study. Likewise, this approach has been described as one of the most common approaches to qualitative data analysis (Bryman, 2008).

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Findings**

#### ***Research question 1***

***To what extent do the residences of Nyamaga district get access and listen to Haki za Binadamu program?***

The findings reveal that the number of people in Nyamagana district who get access and listen to *haki za binadamu* program is very scant. It was further disclosed that the accessibility of the radio station itself was very poor in the district. These findings were also confirmed by journalists; including the presenters of the *haki za binadamu* program. They admitted that access to this program has been a challenge due to regular power cut-offs. Apart from frequency power cut-offs, it was also noted that the contents of the program was very poor and irrelevance. This was confirmed by majority (70%) of respondents during the focus group discussion. Likewise, it was observed that majority (80%) of audiences in the rural areas were rarely able to get access to the *haki za binadamu* program due to poor coverage.

#### ***Research question 2***

***To what extent has “haki za binadamu” program succeeded to promote the rights of elderly women in Nyamagana district?***

The findings reveal that *haki za binadamu* program has played very scant contribution in promoting the rights of elderly women in Nyamagana district. It was disclosed by majority (80%) of informants in the focus group discussion that *haki za binadamu* has not played any visible contribution in promoting the rights of elderly women in Nyamagana and even in other places

where it covers. Furthermore, majority (85%) of the journalists specialized in human rights reporting also confirmed that the program had not played any significant contribution. They explained that the coverage of radio SAUT FM was very poor and not guaranteed in most of the time, thus, the program had not managed to reach as many audience as possible and making it fail to inform those audiences about the rights of elderly women. Contrary to the journalists and informants in the focus group discussions, the police officers reported that *haki za binadamu* program had played significant contributions in promoting the rights of elderly women in the district. They explained that in their area, the access of radio SAUT is moderate and that they usually listen to *haki za binadamu* program in order to discover the reported cases relating to the violation of elderly women. They also confirmed that sometimes are invited by radio SAUT to go and educate audiences about the rights of elderly women in the *haki za binadamu* program. Though they did not provide tangible statistics, the police officers said that the program as helped to reduce the killing of elderly women in the district.

## DISCUSSIONS

As suggested from the findings that there is a very scant contribution of community radios in promoting and protecting the rights of elderly women and other humans' rights around Mwanza region in Tanzania. Through *haki za binadamu* program, it is obvious that community radio stations still have a lot to do in order to play their watchdog roles in the communities they operate. One of the practical implications of these findings could be that there is a very serious problem with the way how community radios are run and operated in Tanzania and perhaps in most of the developing countries. It was expected in these findings to find out that *haki za binadamu* program has played significant contributions towards advocating and promoting the rights of elderly women in Nyamagana district. These findings are surprising and they were not expected at all from this study because of the reputation of the radio (radio SAUT FM) which is not only a community radio but it is also a teaching radio station used by university students. With these findings, it can be suggested that the contributions of community radios in Tanzania is still very scant.

Furthermore, these findings have confirmed what previously scholars such as Ochichi and White (2013) who noted about the challenges facing community radio stations in Africa. They explained

that financial program has been one of the major stumbling blocks to many of community radios in developing countries, and because of this, community radio stations have been affected with poor coverage and no coverage at all in some areas especially in the rural areas. During data collection, it was observed that most of the equipment in the radio studio were in poor conditions. Likewise, most of the programs; including *haki za binadamu* program were not sent on air because of electricity problem. This observation is not surprised to be found in most of the community radios in Tanzania.

However, regarding the issue of poor contents of the *kazi za binadamu* program, it is obvious that most of the journalists who are working in community radios in Africa seem to lack suitable skills in preparing contents for the audiences. With the presence of poor contents in *kazi za binadamu* program it can be concluded that majority of other community radios in Tanzania and perhaps in all developing countries do not have qualified or training staff with specializations in preparing programs for community radios. Kamlongera (2001) suggested that in order to have well prepared programs for the community radios, it is paramount for owner community radios to recruit journalists who have skills or trainings on how to prepare programs for community radios.

In nutshell, what can be said about these findings is that community radios hereby represented by *haki za binadamu* program, has not played any commendable contributions in promoting human rights especially the rights of marginalized persons such as elderly women. The findings suggest that unstable financial problem facing community radios in Tanzania and most of the developing countries has affected the watchdog roles of community radios and that diminishing their expected roles and contributions in the communities they serve. This should be a challenge to the government, media owners, human right activists, and other stakeholders to realize the significance of community radios in Tanzania by investing much for the sustainability of the present community radios available in the country so that other developing countries may learn from Tanzania.

## CONCLUSION

Having presented and discussed the contributions of *haki za binadamu* program in promoting the rights of elderly women in Tanzania it can thus be concluded that the watchdog roles of community radios in Tanzania is still questionable. It can also be concluded that it seems there is still lack of investments on community radios in Tanzania. The presence of poor working environment, lack of studio equipment, frequency power cut-offs are just among other indicators which justify that community radios in Tanzania are neither given much attention like commercial radios nor their contributions are not given same weight like those of commercial or entertainment radios. Lastly, it is the right time for the government of Tanzania to realize the potentiality of community radio stations and their ability to reach almost all classes of community members, including those in the rural and urban areas, thus, in order to eradicate the violations of elderly women in the country and other violations against human rights, it is a high time to revisit the past mistakes and realize the importance of community radios in our communities.

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