

COMMUNITY RADIOS THE MISSING LINK IN ZIMBABWE AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION (ZIM ASSET)

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ABSTRACT *This paper looks at how the media and in particular radio broadcasts can impact positively on this new economic blue-print. The bias towards radio is because the distribution of newspapers in Zimbabwe is concentrated on major urban centres that are along the major highways thus alienating those in rural and farming communities who are a key component in selected two of the four clusters in ZimAsset.*

KEYWORDS: Community Radios, Sustainable Socio-Economic, Broadcasting, Media

INTRODUCTION

After winning the 2013 Harmonised Elections, the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), formed a new government to preside over the nation up to 2018 when the next election is due. In order provide a systematic way of governance, the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) produced a new economic blueprint which was to guide the economy during this new 5-year mandate. This economic blue-print is the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZimAsset). It is composed of four clusters namely Food Security and Nutrition, Social Services and Poverty Eradication, Infrastructure and Utilities, and Value Addition and Beneficiation (GoZ, 2013a: 6). Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA, 2009: vii) postulates that availability and access to information by a greater number of citizens is a critical part of a functioning country's democracy and development. In this instance communication is needed in order to foster development. According to Mtimde (et al, 1998: 15) radio is the most accessible medium of mass communication that is also effective in communities where most people can neither read nor write as all people can speak and listen. Also of significance is that radio listening can be secondary activity (DeFleur & Dennis, 1994: 414). People can listen to the radio whilst doing any other activities. This paper looks at how the media and in particular radio broadcasts can impact positively on this new economic blue-print. The bias towards radio is because the distribution of newspapers in Zimbabwe is concentrated on major urban centres that are along the major highways thus alienating those in rural and farming communities who are a key component in selected two of the four clusters in ZimAsset.

Zimbabwe Agenda for Socio Economic Transformation (Zim Asset)

The turn of the century brought gloom into the Zimbabwean economy. As the relations with Western powers went sour after the Zimbabwean agrarian reform, both agricultural and economic activity went into a downturn. Massive de-industrialisation was witnessed and many people became jobless. There was hyperinflation which led to an overall decline of the

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 50% in 2008 (GoZ, 2013a: ix). After more than a decade of economic decline as a result of sanctions by the west, the GoZ produced a new economic blueprint ZimAsset. Its aim is to revive the dwindling social situation in the country. The vision of ZimAsset is 'Towards an empowered society and a growing economy' whilst its mission is 'To provide an enabling environment for sustainable economic empowerment and social transformation to the people of Zimbabwe' (GoZ, 2013a: ix).

The implementation of the programme is underpinned on the Results Based Management (RBM) system. The blue print takes cognisance of the fact that Zimbabwe is endowed with vast natural resources that can be used to turn its fortunes for better (GoZ, 2013a: 3). These include mineral deposits, prime agricultural land, sunlight and water. Of note is the acknowledgement that, "The agricultural sector, being the backbone of the economy underpinning economy growth, food security and poverty eradication ..." (GoZ, 2013a: 5).

Broadcasting in Zimbabwe

The history of broadcasting in Zimbabwe dates back to the year 1933 in the then Southern Rhodesia although professional broadcasting only began in 1941 (OSISA, 2009: 10). During this period, broadcasting only targeted the then ruling white minority. The Broadcasting Act of 1957 guaranteed the state a monopoly over broadcasting.

When the country gained independence in 1980, the Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation (RBC) became the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC). The government through British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) consultancy rebranded and remodeled the former RBC into a broadcaster that suited the new political dispensation. The results were three radio stations and one television station. Radio One which broadcasted in English targeting the urban elites, Radio Two which broadcasted in Shona and Ndebele plus other minority languages targeting mainly the rural population and finally Radio Three which broadcasted in English targeting the urban youths. In 1984 a new station Radio Four was born. It worked closely with the Ministry of Education's Audio Visual Services, as well as other relevant government ministries and non-governmental organisations to produce educational programmes then known as 'radio lessons'.

Following the enactment of ZBC Commercialization Act in 2001, the structural mandate of the stations was transformed. The radio stations were renamed Spot FM, Radio Zimbabwe, Power FM and National FM respectively. National FM formally Radio Four was given the mandate to broadcast in all vernacular languages some which were being covered by the then Radio Two as it was now mandated to broadcast in Shona and Ndebele only. Before the digitalisation programme, Zimbabwe had 24 transmission sites dotted around the country. These however, were not enough to ensure universal coverage as per the tenets of the Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) model. The transmission sites in some instances did not have enough antennae for all the four radio stations. It is only Radio Zimbabwe that was covered by all these transmission sites. Also of note is that the station has had a relationship with the generality of the rural populace since the days of RBC African Services.

In 2012 two more stations namely Star FM owned by Zimpapers 1980 Limited and ZiFM owned AB Communications went on air to make a total of six radio stations licensed by the authorities to broadcast in Zimbabwe. Eight more commercial radio stations were licensed in 2015 to broadcast in various centers but so far only three have started broadcasting due to the harsh economic environment. These are Diamond FM in Mutare, Hevoi FM in Masvingo and

Faya FM in Midlands. Capital FM, Nyaminyami FM, YA FM, Skyz Metro FM and Breeze FM only managed to beat the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) September 2016 deadline to switch on but are struggling to sustain operations. They only went live to avoid having their licenses withdrawn. Under the new dispensation, a license holder pays \$15 000 plus one percent of their gross profits annually. The license is valid for ten years.

The Role of Media in Society

The media is essentially concerned about the production and distribution of knowledge (McQuail 2010: 63). For a society to exist in harmony there is need for a communication channel to facilitate the distribution of knowledge to dispersed audiences. Knowledge enables society to make sense of lived experiences. In view of that, Dominick, (1993), identified five functions of mass communication to society namely surveillance, interpretation, linkage, transmission of values and entertainment. He further states that people use mass media for cognition, diversion, social utility and withdrawal. For the purpose of this paper, focus will be surveillance, interpretation and linkage on functions, and, cognition and social utility for use of the media. The reason for the choice of these is because they resonate well with expectations of ZimAsset.

ZimAsset is an ambitious programme that is set to transform the social and economic spheres of Zimbabwe. To achieve that, there is need for a total buy in by those concerned. As mentioned above that newspaper distribution in Zimbabwe lacks national scope, there is need for a medium that at least reaches a wider population. According to (DeFleur and Dennis, 1994: 581), 'the mass media facilitate the fast and widespread presentation of that information and thus stimulate social change.'

It is important to note that agriculture is critical to the development of the Zimbabwean economy. According to Nyareza and Dick, approximately 80% of the population's livelihoods are dependent on agriculture (2012: 2). It is because of agriculture being central to the economy that there is a Food Security and Nutrition cluster in the economic blue print ZimAsset. Of note is that Zimbabwe used to be a bread basket of the Southern Africa region but this is no longer the case now. Thus there is need to revive the food production aspect to ensure that livelihoods are transformed.

At the turn of the millennium, Zimbabwe conducted a land reform exercise which saw over 300 000 families being resettled. The resettlement programme changed the population distribution patterns meaning that the need for a medium of mass communication to create linkages between these people became even greater. The dependency theory acknowledges the role of mass communication in bridging such dispersed populations. DeFleur and Dennis (1994) summed it up when they posited that people in all societies need information in order to make decisions about such matters as food, shelter, employment, transportation, political issues, entertainment and other aspects of family life (19). The assertion of these scholars fits well into the four clusters of ZimAsset. However, what has not been made clear in the blue print is how this information is to be diffused into various communities which make up Zimbabwe.

Of the various functions of the media, surveillance is key as the media provide information on what is happening in the society through news and informative programmes (Dominick, 1993: 34, DeFleur & Dennis, 1994: 387). Information is gathered from different arenas and disseminated to enable the generality of the society to understand the situation prevailing at

different times. Surveillance provides early warning on what is to happen and also transmits useful information on what would have happened on a particular day (instrument surveillance).

The media does not only provide raw information to the public. It also gives meaning to events and data that would have been gathered and transmitted. Dominick (1993: 39) referred to this function as the interpretation role. Media organisations select issues that they view as important and give these prominences in coverage. Experts in these areas are given time and space to clarify them to audiences so that they can be easily understood. This function links closely with that of surveillance for it gives meaning to that which would have been gathered during the surveillance period.

The other function of the media that is vital to this discussion is that of linkage (Dominick, 1993: 42). This responsibility involves the media bringing together different spheres of the society that are dispersed geographically or otherwise. As the media covers an event in one corner of the country and report on it, they will be executing this function. McQuail (2010: 65), refers to this function as the forum or platform in his metaphoric roles of the media. Dialogue between audiences and producers of information is facilitated through the media. A programme such as *Murimi Wanhasi/Umlimi Wanamhla* (Today's Farmer) on Radio Zimbabwe is an example of programmes that promote dialogic exchange of information between audiences and experts.

In view of the broadcasting structure explained above, it is vital to relate it to culture and society. Of note in this instance are idealism and interdependence. On idealism, 'the media are assumed to have a potential to significantly influence, but it is the particular ideas and values conveyed by the media which are seen as the primary causes of social change, irrespective of who owns and controls' (McQuail, 1984: 62). Also according to McQuail (1984: 63):

Interdependence implies that mass media and society are continually interacting and influencing each other (as are society and culture). The media (as cultural industries) respond to the demand from society for information and entertainment and, at the same time, stimulate innovation and contribute to a changing social-cultural climate, which sets off new demands for communication.

Thus there is need to ensure that in all programmes that are done in the society, there is need to ensure that there is a specified task for the media. It is therefore vital for there to be a research to find out if the media has played a role in informing the generality of the Zimbabweans particularly those in remote areas about the ZimAsset economic blue print. It is through people having adequate information about the programme that they can buy it in. Also the sectors that have been chosen for this research depend on well-crafted information strategies for them to bear fruits.

A Case for Community Broadcasting

Community broadcasting is a broadcasting service not for profit, owned and controlled by a particular community under an association, trust or foundation (Mtimde, et al., 1998: 16). In some instances it can be owned by non-governmental organisations working in communities. Nyareza and Dick (2012: 5), contend that community stations are expected to pursue social

developmental agendas by being responsive to the community's needs and priorities. In doing so, it means that the station is accountable to its stakeholders. A responsive station gives its listeners a sense of belonging to the station thus there is a huge buy-in to its programming.

According to Locksley, community broadcasting provides a bottom-up return communication as well as offer lateral communication (2009: 7). As a result, it enables communities to share interests. Through lateral communication, there is maximization of relevance of media content as the audience is composed of a community of interest, be they farmers, women groups, among others. When a community is empowered to generate and distribute information within its boundaries, it is bound to develop as such information has high chances of being adopted as its consumers identify with those who generate it.

Community broadcasting is a useful tool for communication as it fosters ties in a society. A unified society is bound to grow as it shares information easily. A community station thus is a key component in development as espoused in their characteristics which include the following:

- It is operated in communities, for communities, about communities, and by communities in local languages.
- It involves extensive local participation in management and programme production.
- Individual community members and local institutions (including volunteers) are the main sources of support for radio stations.
- Its motivation is to support the well-being of communities, not achieve commercial returns.
- It focuses on the information most relevant to communities – especially development issues and education (Locksley, 2009: 7-8).

Thus the sense of belonging to the station creates a major buy in for its programming from the surrounding communities. Is there a role for community broadcasting in Zim Asset? Only a scientific inquiry can prove that.

METHODOLOGY

In order to find out if there is need for a paradigm shift in the way information is distributed in relation to the ZimAsset economic blueprint the authors conducted a survey on the subject. The authors thus made this research a descriptive study as it sought explanations on the way the media has fared in informing the nation about the new economic blue print and how future blue prints must be sold to the public. The reason for making the study a survey is because surveys are regarded as useful in documenting existing community conditions, characteristics of the population, and community opinion. Considering that ZimAsset is expected to be the anchor of the transformation of the livelihoods of Zimbabweans, it was imperative to conduct this study to gather if the views of those in the echelons of power have cascaded to the generality of the citizenry and how much they understand them.

The research was conducted in Makonde Rural District in Mashonaland West Province. The province used to be of the bread baskets of the country in the era before the land reform programme and Makonde District led others in staple cereal food production. Statistics from

the 2012 census show that the district has a population of 153 540 in 34 917 households (ZimStats 2012: 136). For this research, a sample of 3 000 households were selected. In this study, the researchers used systematic sampling method to determine households to be included and purposive sampling for community leaders. According to Wrench et al, systematic sampling is just as effective as simple random sampling as long as there is no systematic order to listing a population (2008: 287). There is no systematic formula used in allocating rural residential stands but they are given on a first come first serve basis. On the other hand, purposive sampling enables the researcher to select participants that have specific information vital to their research (Wrench et al, 2008: 290). It was important to have the input of local leadership as the periodically address their subjects on various issues on their livelihoods.

The study used questionnaires for the general citizenry and face-to-face interviews with community leaders to gather data. Questionnaires gave respondents the inspiration of anonymity which encouraged them to respond reducing the likelihood of them exaggerating or downplaying issues (Berg and Lune, 2012: 115). This advantage of using questionnaires was experienced in this study. Out of a total of 3 000 questionnaires distributed, all were returned, completely filled by respondents who were confident of the privacy that the questionnaire assured them. In order to ensure that questionnaires were attended to by respondents and returned on time, the research used self-administered questionnaires. According to Oppenheim (1992: 103), self-administered questionnaires ensure a high response rate, accurate sampling and minimum interviewer bias, while permitting interviewer assessments, providing necessary explanations (but not the interpretation of questions) and giving the benefit of a degree of personal contact.

The other instrument used was face to face interviews and these were done with community leaders. Interviews were deemed suitable for this group because of their role as opinion leaders and thus have influence over their subjects in the information distribution chain. Through interviews the researcher had the advantage of also observing nonverbal expressions from respondents which enabled the researcher to deduce the amount of cooperation respondents had besides just getting the verbal answers. This assisted the researcher to ascertain the degree of appreciation the respondents had in the study than just to fulfill pastime which would have misinformed the study. However the use of interviews denied the respondents anonymity as Zimbabweans are skeptical on matters they think have political connotations. However the researcher ensured the respondents their privacy and confidence by not recording the interviews on camera.

FINDINGS

The majority of the respondents were female and they constituted 56% of the total respondents. The residents of Makonde District have their livelihoods firmly grounded on agricultural activities thus they suited well in the first cluster of food security and nutrition. The need for a better life through the provision of social services and poverty eradication comes to fruition if the farmers are able to get better yields from their core activity. The research found out that 2 347 households representing 78% of the respondents relied on radio for news and current affairs. This is attributed to the rise in numbers of people who have cellphones which also receive radio signal. Added to that is the ability of radio to be listened to whilst the listener is doing something else unlike newspapers and television to which one

has to focus all their attention. This was mainly because the area is not yet fully electrified and also because it is not along any major road thus there are no newspapers. They only get them when they go to major cities or if visitors come from the cities. The few that have televisions complained about the poor signal from the national broadcaster.

Of the six stations that have a national scope in their coverage, Radio Zimbabwe had the highest number of listeners as shown on Figure 1 below:

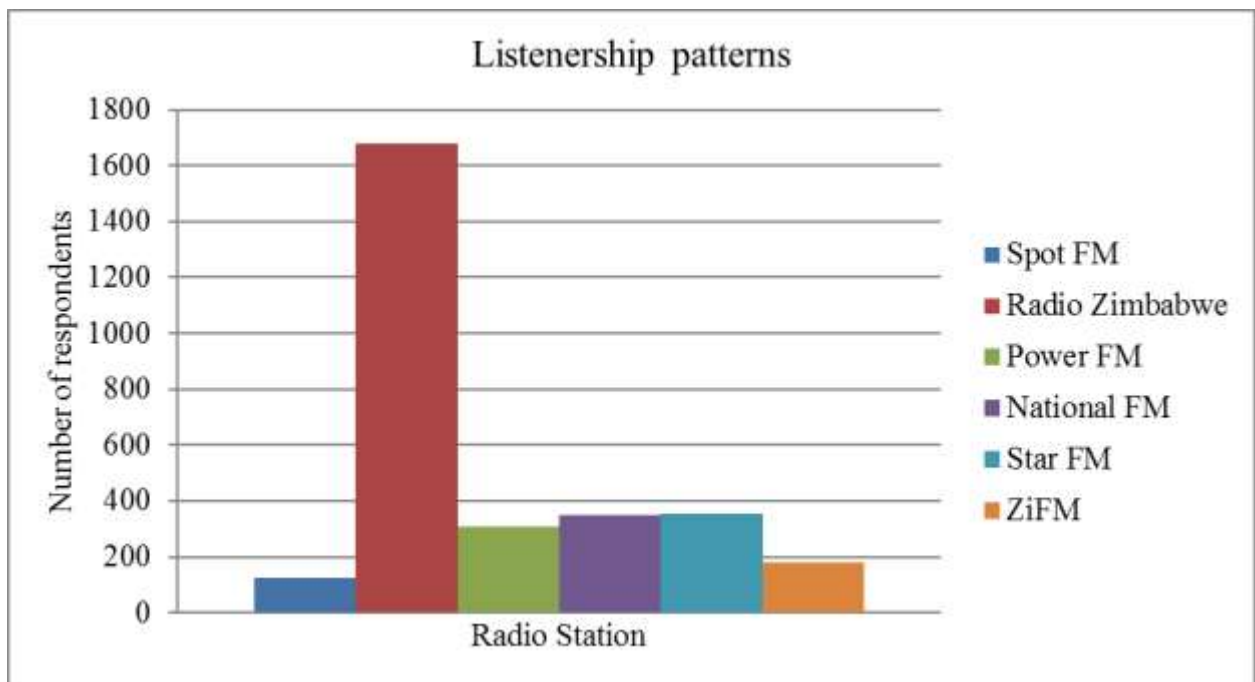


Figure 1: Listenership patterns for local radio stations in Makonde District.

The research found out that 56 percent of the respondents listen to the radio during most of their time and the station of choice being Radio Zimbabwe. The most listened to programmes are *Nhau/Indaba*, the morning show *Kwayedza/Kusile* and *Kwaziso/Ukubingelelana*. Figure 2 below shows the most popular programmes according to respondents:

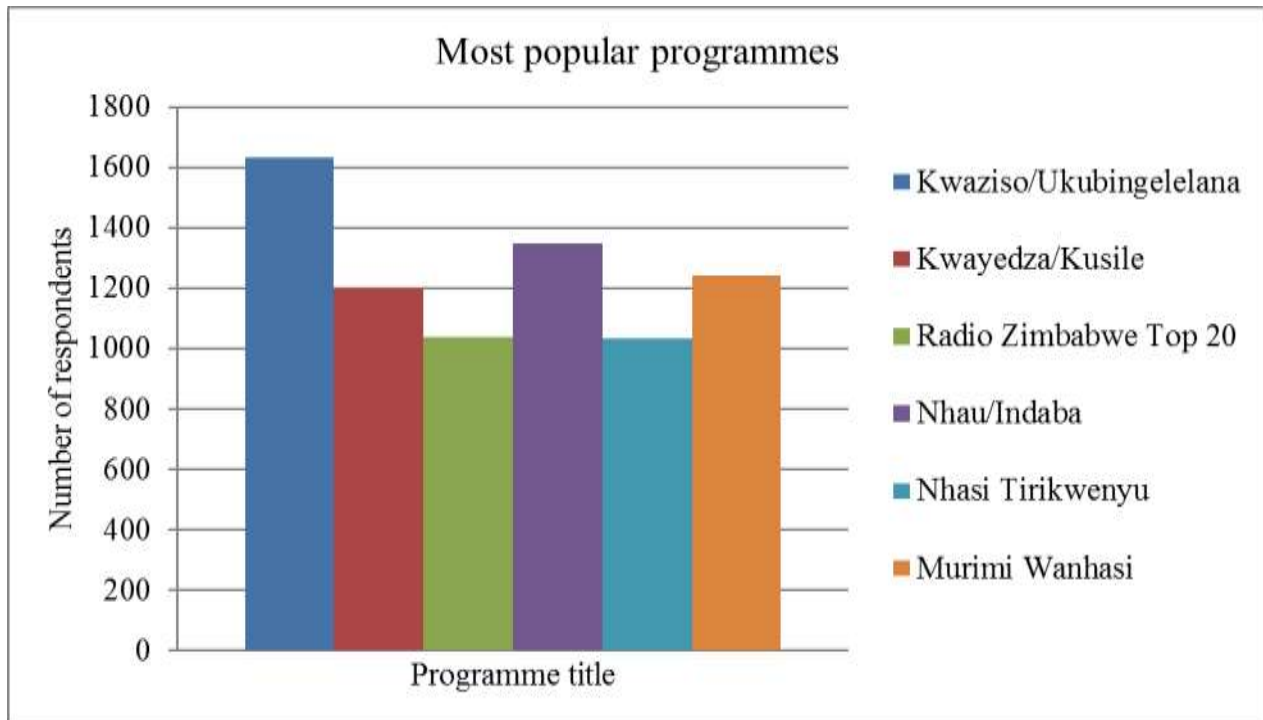


Figure 2: Most popular programmes.

The figure above shows that the most popular programme is *Kwaziso/Ukubingelelana* which is a programme where audiences write or phone in greeting their loved ones and selecting a song to be played. Thus it gratifies the entertainment aspect in audiences. The same goes with *Kwayedza/Kusile* and *Radio Zimbabwe Top 20*. They are all entertainment programmes. *Nhau/Indaba* is news in Shona and Ndebele respectively. *Nhasi Tirikwenyu* is a programme in which journalists from Radio Zimbabwe visit various areas and interview people doing various projects detailing their achievements and challenges. Thus it fulfills the linkage function of radio as discussed above. However, respondents also decried that the programme is not given ample time thus it takes too many weeks focusing on one area when the country has so many districts which have varying economic activities. The same goes with the programme *Murimi Wanhasi*. It is a programme in which experts in agriculture are interviewed and farmers are given a chance to phone in asking questions and getting answers instantly. Like *Nhasi Tirikwenyu*, it is also broadcast once a week with only 30 minutes. As a result time to inform farmers on new and correct farming trends that can lead to food security, high nutrition and an improved standard of life is limited.

On the issue of ZimAsset, all the respondents acknowledged that they knew about the existence of the blue print. Their sources of knowledge were through various media and fora as shown below:

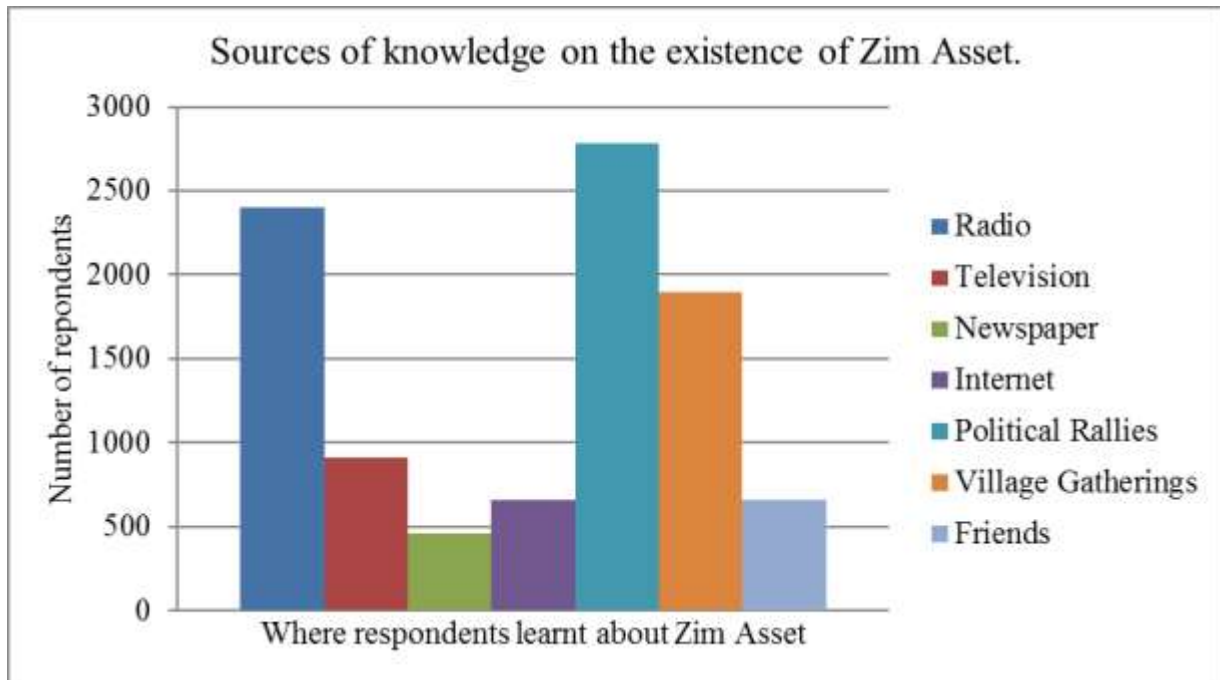


Figure 3: Sources of knowledge on the existence of Zim Asset.

The respondents acknowledged that there is always talk about ZimAsset through the media and at rallies particularly those by the ruling party (ZANU PF). On the news there is always mention of the term ZimAsset and linking it with various ongoing activities. However, 1 999 respondents (67%) said they only know that there is such a programme but it has not been well explained to them what the programme seeks to achieve and how they can work towards such gains. They claim that those who address them at rallies and other village gatherings do explain in detail on what ZimAsset entails. The same happens with radio were it is only linked to various programmes on the news without giving further details on it.

CONCLUSIONS

This research sought to interrogate the role of radio in information distribution. It focused on radio in relation to an economic blue print namely ZimAsset. It was conducted in form of a survey in Makonde District of Mashonaland West Province. The research found out that though the majority of respondents acknowledged the existence of the blue print, they did not know the history of its origins and what it seeks to achieve. It found out that the media and opinion leaders also do not aid in knowledge dissemination as they give out fragmented information. As a result society is not well informed. The media in particular radio, focus much on entertainment. For example Radio Zimbabwe the station followed by most of the respondents has an average of 2 hours 30 minutes daily set for *Kwaziso/Ukubingelelana* as opposed to 30 minutes weekly for an informative programme *Nhasi Tirikwenyu*. Such imbalances have led to an ill-informed but highly entertained society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Zimbabwe's economy is largely dependent on agriculture thus it has to be made sustainable particularly to the resettled farmers. According to the constitution, the country has 16 official languages (GoZ, 2013b: 17). Of these languages, sign language does not apply to radio for radio is a medium for the ears. With the current number of stations providing broadcasting services, they cannot satisfy the number of languages enshrined in the national constitution without prejudicing minority languages like Nambya and Tonga among others. It is for this reason that this paper advocates for the creation of community radio stations. These will be able to create programming that suit each particular region thus enhancing food security which becomes the bedrock of achieving the targets of Zim Asset. Community radios relate well to the adoption theory whose three clusters are invention, adoption curve and awareness (DeFleur and Dennis, 1994: 579-81). Communities share information leading to new systems which are then adopted over time with the media playing the role of the midwife. Currently Zimbabwe is having food deficits because farmers in drought prone areas are not taking heed of the need to grow small grains as opposed to maize. The reason is this information is not getting the much needed attention on the current radio stations in relation to natural farming regions as would happen over community radio stations. When a community has a sense of ownership for any particular programme, they will work for it to prosper. Thus if communities have their own radio stations, they will produce programmes that enable them to share information easily. Such stations also enable the media to focus on issues that benefit the surrounding communities easily. For example the programme *Nhasi Tirikwenyu* on Radio Zimbabwe is beneficial but it takes too long for them to move around the whole country. However, when done in a smaller community the programme fosters diffusion of innovations.

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