

**Radio and Television News Exchange**

**By**

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**RADIO AND TELEVISION NEWS EXCHANGE**

**IN AFRICA**

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Moves to exchange news began in 1962 when URTNA (Union of National Radio and Television Organisation in Africa) was created. It was to serve as mechanism for exchange of programmes and information among member state of Africa.

The main objective was to reduce the imbalance in the flow of news in the North-South direction and also to produce news programmes seen through the eyes of Africans and international audience.

URTNA groups countries from sub saharan Africa and North Africa and has 42 members. Since its inception, programme exchange has been the raison d'être of its existence. Radio programmes on subjects like culture, education, health, agriculture, drama, music and sports were mailed and exchanged from its programme exchange centre in Nairobi.

One can say with the establishment of URTNA, the quality of programmes has improved considerably. There has also been a steady increase in the number of programmes contributed to URTNA programmes library each year, e.g.

- 1978 - 21 TV and 78 radio programmes were contributed
- 1979 - 16 TV and 110 radio programmes were contributed
- 1980 - 43 TV and 194 radio programmes were contributed
- 1981 - 67 TV and 149 radio programmes were contributed
- 1982 - 67 TV and 149 radio programmes were contributed
- 1983 - 83 TV and 226 radio programmes were contributed
- 1984 - 124 TV and 221 radio programmes were contributed
- 1985 - 65 TV and 94 radio programmes were contributed

Out of this, 40% can be classified as development oriented on Agric, health and educational topics and the remaining 60% on general information topics. On TV programmes 35% fall under entertainment, 32% developmental, 22% cultural and 11% general information. It is clear from the above that far more radio than Tv programmes were exchanged. The reason being that radio programme exchange is relatively less complicated and less expensive. Of about an estimated 47 Tv stations in Africa, not more than 12 have the capacity to produce and exchange Tv news programmes; i.e. the availability of satellites and manpower resources.

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The situation led to an over dependence on foreign Television organisations for events. Apart from the Magreb region there was virtually no television news exchange and URTNA had no mechanism for the exchange of television news on a daily basis.

However since 1979, URTNA, with the assistance of FES and UNESCO, started serious initiatives on a television news exchange - Afrovision.

In 1983, it took part in a global 6 weeks Tv news exchange experiment which confirmed the feasibility of such a programme. It started a training programme in Cairo, Egypt in 1985. This was followed by several workshops, meetings and seminars. But the final break through came in 1990 in Senegal, Dakar. Broadcasting and Telecommunications officials and senior Tv journalists of 12 URTNA member countries and representatives of sister unions and international organisations met. They included Ghana, Kenya, Libya, Nigeria, Senegal, Tunisia, Egypt, Cote d'Ivoire and Zimbabwe. The organisations were ABU, CBU, EBU, INTELSAT, UNESCO and PANA. That meeting decided to launch Afrovision on January 2nd 1991- an African Television news exchange network via satellite in collaboration with African Broadcasting Stations and telecommunications administration and the worldwide satellite body INTELSAT, other broadcasting unions and the FES. To benefit from existing intercontinental South-South and South-North exchange, Afrovision is to be linked to similar regional networks like Asiavision, Arabvision, Carribvision and Eurovision. Ten of the twelve countries at the Dakar meeting immediately decided to join Afrovision.

The trial period was for 3 months on non stop commercial basis. Algeria was chosen as the coordinating centre because of its experience and membership of other networks and the availability of exchange facilities.

The pioneers of the Afrovision are Ghana, Nigeria, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Cote d'Ivoire, Zimbabwe, Cameroon and Senegal.

Exchange of transmission is everyday at 1600 hrs GMT. The co-ordinating centre books in block 30 mins for intelsat facilities like space segment and the member countries share the cost. Each member is expected to ensure satellite feedback <sup>to the</sup> ~~in the~~ coordinating centre during exchange. And each country uses its own logo and test pattern.

The type of items ~~to be~~ exchanged are normally non calendar news with a bias in economic, social and cultural matters and also of international interest. Each station has to send a short list and explanatory text to Algiers everyday by 1200 hrs GMT- this presupposes that every station has telecommunication facilities like telex, fax and four wire. ~~The picture quality must be between 60-100%~~ <sup>items</sup> must have natural sound or ~~interact~~ and no voice over. Even though the technical requirement also demands a 4 wire (SND with Newsroom, Studio, P&T and C station) most of the countries do not have that facility.

## ASSESSMENT OF TRIAL PERIOD

After the trial some teething problems came up.

<sup>THESE</sup>  
~~These~~ included technical problems at the co-ordinating centre. Most countries could not use the items because there were no scripts to go with the pictures. Also many stations did not send in their scripts in time and most times some did not send scripts at all. There has been a general feeling of satisfaction among members that the experiment is worth pursuing. At an evaluation meeting in March this year in Dakar, delegates of thirteen countries agreed that, it was a big success and that the experiment had gone much better than all had expected- in spite of all the problems.

During the trial period- 2nd January to March 1991 a total of 342 items had been exchanged amongst members.

Nigeria was leading with 74 items and Ghana 4th with 46 items. 48% of these items was on politics, 17% on culture, 14.3% on economic, 14% on sports, 4% was on entertainment and 1% on the environment.

Seven countries agreed to start the permanent phase which began on the 17th April 1991. They were Ghana, Nigeria, Egypt, Algeria, Cote d'Ivoire, Zimbabwe and Tunisia. This membership has however been reduced to five. Cameroon has withdrawn due to financial reasons. Senegal has closed down its Television station for renovation and Cote d'Ivoire cannot Up-link due to technical problems. Tunisia hardly contributes. - More countries - Kenya, Gabon, Burkina Faso, Zaire and Angola have indicated their intention to participate but have not yet done so. Even though Mali is also keen in participating, it has no ground station and can only receive but not transmit. Membership of Afrovision is either passive or active. Active members are those who contribute items to the exchange as well as receive. Passive members are those who only receive and these are only accepted if they have no facilities to transmit i.e. Up-link facilities. So far Mali is the only passive member.

## FORMAT

The format for the permanent phase has not changed and the exchange still starts at 1600 GMT and time allotted is thirty minutes. A member can send more than one offer if other members do not take up their allotted time. The standard condition each station has is 5 seconds for identification caption, 5 seconds for countdown, and transmission by item which could be between 2 minutes 30 seconds and 3.00 minutes and followed by 3 seconds end of transmission.

## COST

The cost for the 30 block booking with Intelsat is \$480 a day which is shared by all countries. In addition, the coordinating centre in Algiers pays the P&T \$144 per day. Passive members pay 60% of the fee paid by the active members. If more countries are expected to participate and if the exchange program is to be sustained, the charges by local P&Ts has to be further reduced.

## TECHNICAL OPERATIONS

The technicians send technical information on regular basis to the coordinating centre.

## APPRAISAL

Since the start of the permanent phase, there has been increase in the number of items exchanged even though the number of countries has reduced considerably. A total of about 105 stories were sent by Ghana as at 18th September 1991 and about 96 stories were used by GBC TV from Afrovision. GBC used more Afrovision stories than any other station. It must be noted that GBC would use items on Afrovision if even those same items appear on other channel like CNN or AITV or DPA.

## OBSERVATIONS

There seems to be large concentration of exchange items on politics. There is also the tendency among member countries to send items only about their heads of state - be they courtesy calls, official visits. Next to politics the subject that receives most attention by all contributors is sports. There is little news about women and children even though they form a significant proportion of the African population. This writer believes it is because most of the coordinators are male and hopes the issue will be addressed. Issues about the environment which are very crucial to most African countries are scarcely exchanged. Perhaps the whole content structure of exchange will have to be looked into.

INSPIRE  
OF ALL THESE PROBLEMS - WE SAY "URIAIA, AFROVISION  
AND AFRICA HAS COME A LONG WAY. THAT THE EXCHANGE  
HAS TAKEN OFF AT ALL IS SATISFACTORY ENOUGH.