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**RADIO BROADCASTING AND RURAL
DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA**

**MEDIA MESSAGES AND WOMEN FOOD
PRODUCERS IN MALAWI**

A Research Proposal

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Preface

Rita Crowley-Turner tragically died on 8th May 1996 before completing this proposal for her PhD after less than a year into the process. With its publication I am fulfilling a promise I made to myself, to Rita's colleagues and to her family that we would attempt to encourage future research in this much neglected area of work which Rita was pioneering. Ultimately, we at DESTIN would like to establish a PhD Studentship in media and development in Rita's honour and would welcome any ideas or donors interested in contributing to such a project.

Rita's academic projects were informed by and built upon, her rich and diverse experiences which included 24 years at the BBC World Service, her years in Malawi, and a deep commitment to Catholic activism. Her book on Catholicism and feminism, *The Mary Dimension*, was widely read inside the Church. Rita founded and edited *Moni*, the radical Catholic magazine, which has the largest circulation of all the monthly magazines in Malawi. She was editor of the radio show *Malawi Calling*, and was a weekly columnist on *Women's Advice* for the Malawi News. Rita was an accomplished linguist, fluent in French and Spanish from her undergraduate studies at the University of Sheffield, and widely read in the literature of these countries.

Rita entered the MSc Development Studies programme as a part-time student in 1992 with a passionate commitment to the importance of the media in promoting human development in Africa. Her Masters dissertation, *The President, Prelates and the Press* involved original research in radio archives - specifically African and Malawi materials - and she graduated with a distinction in 1994. Rita's PhD project promised to make an important contribution to the much under-studied domain of the role of media in development.

Rita leaves behind her husband, David Turner and four sons: Mark, Paul, Luke and Matthew. Shortly after her death, Paul wrote that the family "were all overwhelmed with pride in Rita's achievements, not only her academic success but, "as he put it, "her 'partying' and social gusto". At DESTIN, Rita was a source of strength, encouragement and friendship to many research students. Clare Ferguson spoke for everyone at DESTIN when she said, "Rita's friendship meant a great deal to me. I enjoyed her company and she was always interesting, interested, honest and often wickedly funny". As was her way, Rita set a precedent at her Catholic Church in Hemel Hempstead, asking that those gathered at her funeral sing as a farewell, *When the Saints Go Marching In*.

James Putzel

Director, Development Studies Institute

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A Research Proposal

Introduction

I propose to examine the role of radio broadcasting in the agricultural development of Africa. The continent of Africa faces increased food insecurity. (ACARTSOD, Obasanjo) Drought and famine, conflict and bad government seem to persist despite years of effort and expensive development programmes. Recent shifts in power politics symbolised by the dismantling of the Berlin Wall and new financial, economic and social problems (inflation, unemployment) now preoccupy developed countries. (Poznanski) Consequently there are greater pressures on the resources available for development aid. The demise of communism and effects of globalised markets linked to new technologies provoke questions about the "end of History" (Fukuyama). Critiques of 'development' reflect on the meaning of modernity. (Amin, Apter, Crush, Ferguson) The triumph of free market economics has led to measures under Structural Adjustment Policies which have increased difficulties for many poor people, including those in rural areas. (Cornia, Commonwealth, Killick and Bird)

For agriculture, deregulation and privatisation are promoted as means to allow market forces to operate (for example in the reforms required by the IMF and the World Bank as conditions for further aid). For media organisations, too, competition is increasing and there is a new commercial imperative¹ which is partly driven by major technical advances. (Hamelink 1988, 1994, Reeves) Global processes, in particular the influence of Trans National Companies (TNCs), shape the future of both agriculture and broadcasting. (Sklair) There is tension between globalisation as a homogenising force, and fragmentation as a consequence of increased pluralism. As globally organised capital moves from one advantageous location to another, there is a danger that some countries and some people lose their competitive edge (if they have one), and that gaps widen between rich and poor. (Rimmer, 1993) For Africa

"the current manifestations are of a qualitatively different and very grave nature, capable of throwing much of the continent off track for a long time, if not for good. Given the rapidity of technological development in the North and in other parts of the South, this latest wave of dispossession is threatening to lock Africa into the concentric circle farthest from the centre of global power - the periphery of the periphery." (Adedeji,pl.)

One basic assumption in modernising theory was that the mass media would be a powerful means of producing development by diffusing norms and expectations. A developed press was one element in promoting modern national development. (Pye, Schramm) Discussion and information through mass media were predicted to lead to government accountability and democracy. (Lichtenberg) These arguments are persistent, surfacing for

¹In Africa, for reasons to be presented, radio has been predominantly non-commercial.

instance, in debates about famine and food security (Dreze & Sen, 1989) and the transition to democracy (North). The mere existence of adequate media would promote modern values. At the same time it was clear that there was also need for explicitly developmental media (Pool).

In agriculture, which was seen to be the key to producing surplus to invest for industrialisation, the transfer of information and technology was considered essential to improve productivity both to feed the people and to produce a surplus. (McAnany) The comparative advantage of radio² as a mass medium for development offered hope of agricultural as well as social or political benefits. Such references are still made usually with very little knowledge or experience of the realities of sound broadcasting and important physical, technical and manpower constraints. The media in general and radio in particular have not always been as successful as anticipated in promoting modernity or democracy.³ Bliss partly attributes this to the fact that communication infrastructure has received less than 2% of aid development funds. (Bliss)

Whether the growing food insecurity in Africa can be attributed to the lack of realisation of this potential is too simplistic and unprovable a proposition. It is, however, possible to consider how radio has been used, and what information it has provided.

Agricultural radio broadcasts were welcomed as a means of spreading knowledge: my purpose is to discuss how far this has been achieved. Have the changes of emphasis in development theory and practice been reflected in broadcasts? Have producers changed programme content as complexities in agricultural processes have been uncovered? The provision of information implies its reception - how has it been received, and by whom? Have broadcasters tailored their programmes to particular audiences' needs? Have they reacted to the welfare and equity implications of new technologies, which, for instance, the literature on the Green Revolution revealed? Have writers and producers considered the ability of their listeners to understand their programmes?

My hypothesis is that women, who are central to the production of food in Africa, have not been well served by agricultural broadcasters. I propose to question this by considering both the medium and the message. Do the structures of the one dictate the contents of the other? Has the information transmitted in radio programmes been useful (for agricultural development in Africa, and for women farmers there) or has it been irrelevant? One may question whether such information is the most important determinant of innovation.

I first examine the relevant literatures, with three research questions in mind:

- what does agricultural development mean for women?
- has information been appropriate and important?
- has information been delivered to the right people?

There seems to be a general impression that radio has a role to play in agricultural development, but also a general impression that it has failed. (Stevenson) The initial enthusiasm for Development Communications has petered out, and the current discussions are

²Consisting of relatively cheap technology, deeper penetration and lower educational barriers.

³There are many instances where media have been used to very different ends, in Africa as elsewhere (China, USSR, or according to some critics, in the West). (Chomsky)

about participatory or community models. Although there were attempts to measure the effect of particular broadcasts on the adoption of innovations, there has been little interest in questioning the basic premise that mainstream radio is a suitable means of reaching rural producers. There is a lack of empirically based discussion of what may have produced apparent failure. I am interested in the way the local reception of agricultural information is conditioned by the national and international broadcasting system.

I propose therefore to test the general hypothesis with particular reference to its relevance to women farmers in Malawi. Malawi is economically dependent on agriculture, and radio is its dominant mass medium.⁴ The story of agricultural development in Malawi exemplifies many of the themes running through the literature on African development.

2. Agricultural Development

This review of the literature seeks to establish the general conditions of agriculture in Africa, and draw out the implications for women and their information needs. Some debates are identified, which are then carried forward to a review of communications theories.

Any discussion of African agriculture must start with its physical geography and its colonial inheritance, which of course, are intertwined.

The physical realities of a vast landmass mean that there are many different climates and agricultural conditions, ranging from the extremely arid to lush fertility. Soil and water, however, are important factors in African farming, and the incidence of drought or soil degradation have often impeded progress. (Blaikie, Glantz) The physical geography, topography, geology and the position of Africa with regard to trade routes, determined the pattern of colonial rule. (Greave, Griffiths) Colonies served to supply their rulers with primary produce, agricultural or mineral, with strategic staging posts and a pool of labour. The states which gained independence from colonial rule had been shaped by external imperatives, and often corresponded to no physical, political, linguistic or cultural groups. Economies and institutions were outward facing, and shallow-rooted because they were imposed rather than evolved. Infrastructure and legislation were similarly unsuited to specific African realities, and personnel was insufficiently trained and ill equipped. (Davidson, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, Mawhood, Moore, Rimmer, 1991, Vaughan)

Nyasaland was a British protectorate, and independent Malawi was formed by British institutions and culture. (Hazelwood, Mair, Pike, Shepperson) The United Kingdom (UK) supplied aid of every kind. (Morton) In broadcasting: language, organisation, training and physical equipment remain influenced by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). (Mackie)

It was thought that modern, Western, technology and knowledge were the key to producing the same advances in less developed places, as had been the case in Europe and in the United States. This was the impetus for the direction taken by agricultural development. Throw money and information at the farmer, demonstrate improved methods and stock,

⁴It has no television.

encourage adoption and innovation - by extending to the contemporary farmers of Africa the knowledge and practice which had been tested and proved successful, a rapid transition to modernity could be achieved. Assisted takeoff was the hope. (Rostow) Money, machines and men flooded Africa in the firm hope that prosperity would trickle down through society and raise the standards of all.

When it began to be perceived that, though productivity could be raised and profits made, there was no generalised increase in prosperity or welfare, little reinvestment in sustainable production, and no great advance towards an industrialised modern economy, the development community (of academics, practitioners and donors) began a process of critique, modification and model reformation, (Eicher and Staatz, Hayami and Rutzan, Meier, Todaro) From trickle down, through welfare and equity, from statist to market models, and from top-down to grass-roots participation, there has been trim and change. And still no solution.

When it was found that money, education, health and employment did not naturally trickle down to lower levels in African societies, attention was paid to equitable distribution of benefits and to ensuring that poorer sections of society were included in programme and project design. (Chambers, Lipton, Pacey) The state apparatus which had seemed the natural conduit for aid was criticised. (Bauer, Jackson, Sandbrook) Market forces seemed a surer mechanism than poor government. (Wade) Studies of agricultural development, however, continued to assume that a way could be found of transferring knowledge and therefore productivity and also welfare.

Debates about land, labour and produce (crops and livestock), and the influence of the state on each of these topics, are concerned with technology and knowledge, integration into modern cash markets, and modes of production.

LAND

Africa is vast, and has had a relatively sparse population. The general fragility of its soils and the unreliability of water meant that land management and rights in land were important to colonial rulers. Shifting agriculture and pastoralism presented difficulties for colonial administration. Vague, or misunderstood, rights in land were addressed in two main ways - appropriation, or the establishment of individual ownership. European legal norms were imposed on indigenous land tenure systems, and resulted in persisting distortions and confusions. In East and Southern Africa white settlers gained large tracts of, usually, better land. Conflicts over the rights of landowners, tenants and squatters, between large scale farming, small holders, pastoralists and ranching have characterised agricultural development in East Africa. (Francis and Williams) The state was the arbiter of land allocation. Complex systems of classes of ownership developed.

In Nyasaland, the rival claims of administrations, commercial estates (often owned by distant companies) and Africans occupied successive rulers.

The approach taken by different independent governments - nationalisation, laissez-faire attitudes to appropriation, socialist land reform, and the balance between large estate and smallholder sectors, has been critical in determining agricultural development.

Sociological and anthropological analysis has revealed male bias in registration of land, and the failure to understand the differing relations of men and women to land use. In Nyasaland successive administrations tried, with varying motives, to accommodate African ideas of common property rights with European views of commercial production. The independent Malawi of Dr Banda inherited a country with a complex mix of problems. Physically small with a dense population, there was a labour shortage as well as a shortage of land. Large estates producing export crops absorbed productive land and employed labour in ways which offered little security to Africans. Rights to land, traditionally vested in women in many parts of Malawi, and the absence of adult men (migrant labour to neighbouring countries or internally to the estate sector), have led to intense pressure on fertile land - the average smallholding is less than 0.5 hectares.

Another critical debate is about the appropriateness of expert knowledge (of land use, soil protection, stock varieties, machine and imported fertiliser-intense methods). Modern, scientific knowledge was assumed to be neutral and universally applicable. Conservation and soil improvement concerned colonial administrators. Many large scale projects have had contrary effects, sometimes leading to longer-term reduction in efficiency or productivity. Bad results have led to resentment and resistance. Mechanisation has proved harmful to soils, and inappropriately capital-intense. Introduction of foreign varieties has failed because of a lack of understanding of local conditions, and has destroyed indigenous adapted varieties and methods. As soil fertility has decreased through intensive farming methods, pressure on agricultural land has increased, and wild resources (including fuelwood and water) are becoming scarce in some places. These shortages affect men and women differently, in terms of increased labour requirements and decreased income. Increasingly, the value of local knowledge and the importance of social or cultural context, is appreciated and incorporated into farming systems research. (Berdegue)

Intensive cultivation and its relation to soil degradation, and the complex symbiosis between pastoralists and cultivators have been examined in the wake of famines and drought. Management of common resources and environmentalist concerns with biodiversity concentrate attention on land use and its control. What seemed simple, universal solutions - modern technology and private ownership - have proved to need careful application in specific and localised conditions. Short-term capital-intensive agricultural policies may lead to alienation, or neglect to exploitation. Establishing markets in land has been difficult, and often unjust, mainly for poorer farmers. Scattered land holdings - especially relevant to land in a matrilineal society where claims to plots in different locations are maintained separately by women and by men - are difficult to manage, for the individual and for the wider agricultural or legal system.

The extent to which debates about access to and control of land have been understood when agricultural information is transmitted, remains to be explored. Do Western providers of information realise that use of land may be problematic, or have they assumed that crops are always grown on large, well managed, farms? Is the issue of land reform raised in agricultural programmes?

LABOUR

The question of who farmers are, and what influences their productivity, is central to agricultural development especially in any discussion of food security.

As noted above access to and use of land is gender specific. Boserup's realisation that agricultural labour input is also gender specific has been widely developed. In Africa, moreover, women provide a significant proportion of agricultural labour, and grow most of the food crops and small livestock, often consumed domestically. The particular distribution of tasks, and their crop specificity, differs across the continent. One thing remains constant - women have a double burden, agriculturally productive work and socially reproductive work. In other words, they work in the fields and they care for the labour force, and especially for the children, the sick and the old.

The stereotypical 'farmer' - for colonial and for developmental projects - was a male head of household, who could call upon family labour. Gender analysis has found that many failures can be traced to this assumption. The linked notions that a farmer derived all income from purely agricultural activity, and that a household forms an economic unity have been criticised, and found wanting. Different income or expenditure streams, power relations, and labour availability within households, have been found to be important determinants of the outcome of agricultural policies. (Hirschmann and Vaughan)

Discussion over peasant attitudes to innovation and integration into a modern cash economy predated the debate over gender effects in agriculture. In search of an answer to what prevented small scale farmers from seizing the opportunity to innovate and increase income as well as productivity, academics revisited earlier Russian writers on agricultural transition. Chayanov's theories, about the trade-off between effort and reward, posited on the idea that a peasant household is characterised by a degree of self-sufficiency which only increases productivity when needs cannot be met from own resources, seemed valid in the face of African farmers who had few cash needs.

The role of mass media in creating needs is well known. In Malawi, however, Dr Banda aimed to prevent the creation of expensive new tastes, by strict control of the media. (Lwanda) The small farmers' need for cash was for basic services (school fees), and other goods which cannot be supplied from farm production. Women farmers often dependent on remittances, compounded by low local returns to scarce labour, experienced real difficulties. Without cash income, they have experienced difficulty in keeping enough food to last until the next harvest. The need to earn money has resulted in neglect of their own crops when their labour could be sold.

The assumption that 'farmers' derive most of their income from agricultural production has also been challenged. Mixed income streams - from off-farm craft production or employment, migrant workers - as well as complex livelihood strategies to cope with seasonal, family cycle or crisis fluctuations, show that increases in productivity may depend on more than increased information. Differences between the poor and the very poor, among whom woman-headed households cluster, show that many rural people struggle to combine many strategies.

Debate about the behaviour of farmers - old fashioned and resistant to change, or

rational in their aversion to risk, their decisions conditioned by allegiance to community or big men in return for a notional security, or simply lacking the tools and knowledge to prosper - concentrate on individuals rather than on the system. Lipton introduced the idea of urban bias, of political neglect in favour of more powerful minorities. Bates (1981, 1991) moved the debate into the arena of political economy, and the relationship between government intervention and distortion. Freeing farmers from the dead hand of parastatals and getting the prices right has become the prevailing orthodoxy.

This still leaves the problems of why farmers do not respond to market price signals, and become accumulators. Class formation seemed problematic in Africa. Isolated not only from other 'peasants' but from contact with modern values, African farmers did not seem able to form a prosperous middle layer between the poor and the rich. Weak government, or predatory government, seemed to neglect small farmers. One answer would seem to lie in access to markets. Access can be physical, economic or a matter of information. Gender analysis of the barriers to women,⁵ is particularly useful. Male bias in extension and in access to credit, in policy making or implementation may explain why food production can be unresponsive to market forces, and even adversely affected by them.

These debates raise questions which can be asked of agricultural broadcasters, and which may be traced in the content of their programmes. Have the programmes continued to offer the same information, or have they reflected appreciation of the different needs of African women? In particular, have the programmes assumed 'the farmer and his wife', exclusively engaged in agricultural production, or have they addressed some of the issues raised in the literature? Has the information provided remained predominantly Western and 'scientific', or has it included indigenous knowledge?

PRODUCTION

The particularities of land and labour in a country, or within it in different areas, largely determine which crops and livestock are produced. State promotion of export crops, and fluctuations in world demand, interact with the real needs and conditions at the household level of production. Have radio messages been able to balance macro and micro concerns?

For the present purpose, a distinction between food crops and commercial crops may be made. Commercial crops, like beverages, grains, textiles, exotic vegetables and oils are important cash earners, and when exported in a buoyant world market, can account for much of a country's GNP. Food crops, grains, pulses, vegetables etc., may be retained for own consumption or marketed for cash locally or in urban centres.⁶

Once again, the complex interrelations between labour and land are important and determine productivity. Differential demands upon labour or investment may cause some crops to be neglected. The privileging of commercial crops over food (or subsistence) crops may seriously affect household economies, and national production. Western technology may

⁵Especially poorer women who may be heading households with few adult members

⁶These goods may also be exchanged for other goods or for services. Markets do not always need cash.

override local knowledge, not only in relations of production, but also in farming methods. Mono-cropping may be less productive than mixed cultivation. A presumption that production of subsistence crops can be discounted in a household's economic or labour allocation decisions has been found to account for many failures. The state has typically promoted commercial crops, and creamed off the profits, while relying on traditional or subsistence farming to feed rural populations.

For Malawi, the promotion of export crops (tobacco, sugar, tea and rice) in the estate sector, and the requirement that smallholders increase production of maize, without extending land planted to maize, has proved critical. In a society where large numbers of men migrated to mines abroad, and wages in the estate sector were deliberately held down, the responsibility for food production fell chiefly to women. There is a considerable literature on the effects of price manipulation on production.

Radio exhortations to produce more maize were frequent: did these broadcasts affect production? That is, did they increase maize production or divert attention from other food crops? Response to demands to plant new varieties of maize was frustrated by the cost of High Yield Varieties (HYV). The necessity of purchasing fresh seeds and fertilizer proved difficult for most small farmers. (Hirschmann and Vaughan) The grain produced was unappetising for local tastes. Current research and effort is adapting to these conditions, and a programme of research and extension is underway to improve maize yields in Malawi. (Cromwell and Zambezi) Poorer households experiencing annual food deficits have been identified as a prime concern.

The literature on agricultural development in Africa has discussed why small farmers fail to prosper and contribute more to the national economy: it has been concerned with why commoditisation and accumulation have not worked in a predicted way. Government failure is blamed for neglecting agricultural policy or for manipulating it for elite gain. Peasants are blamed or, at best, excused because of their non-responsiveness to price signals. The contribution of household and gender studies, together with appreciation of local knowledge, shows that the small farmer is very responsive to demands, but that these are not always related to prices. The interactions between cash needs and rewards, between non-cash needs and rewards are very complicated. Labour exchange and credit exchange deriving from African systems are clearly important.

In the literature, as in development practice, there is a movement from economic, universalist, top-down concepts to social anthropological, more appropriate and participatory approaches.

The main research question, then, is to see if this same movement is apparent in radio programmes. I suggest that the output of the BBC's English language World Service represents the top - it gathers agricultural information from experts and broadcasts it. In Malawi, the BBC's audience must necessarily be drawn from those with command of English: if these represent an elite (politicians, administrators, educators), do they act as a conduit for the information? Do they filter, translate and pass on the information, and to whom? In a top-down model, the listener at farm level represents the bottom. The category 'listener' needs to be disaggregated to see whether food-producers (women) are reached. In accordance with the idea that indigenous knowledge is valuable, that research needs to incorporate the farmer,

the listener's needs and contribution are now being considered. Is information on its own sufficient for improvement, or are other things - like the distribution of land, access to credit, gender-specific tasks - also important?

3. Radio Broadcasting and Africa

The story of communication by mass media for developmental purposes starts, again, in the North. The technologies of mass communication - newspapers, radio, and later television - were developed in Europe. The continuing influence of the United States of America (USA) both in practice and study of media and communication has implications for development. In an African context, radio is the medium reaching larger and more widely spread audiences. The print media depend on literacy and purchasing power. Television, though more immediate in terms of audience reaction is very costly to install and operate. Both print and television are predominantly available to urban and/or elite populations. (Mytton, Wedell)

Two branches of communications studies are relevant to my project - International Radio Broadcasting (IRB), and Development Communications.

a - International Radio Broadcasting.

IRB has two *raison d'être* - propaganda and development in the broadest sense. After the discovery that radio could cross distance and borders and reach listeners in a way which could not easily be prevented⁷, it was used to influence opinion. Contenders in the World Wars used radio as another weapon. Colonial powers also found that it was a useful way of informing or mobilising opinion in distant lands. Modern external broadcasting systems, like those of the USA (Voice of America), Great Britain (BBC), Germany (Deutsche Welle) have historically competed with each other, as well as, later, in the Cold War battle against the USSR, and China. (Sussman, Wasburn) Their political output (usually in the provision of news and commentary) has been widely studied, and indeed has had real effects.⁸ (Stokke, Wilcox) Many African countries also broadcast across frontiers, for propaganda purposes and because of trans-border language communities. South Africa was, and remains, an important player.⁹

Yet in terms of broadcast hours, there are many hours of non-news programming. This has received less attention. Are the hours of entertainment or information programming merely filling in the spaces between news programmes, do they too serve a political purpose? The BBC, for instance, broadcasts agricultural programmes. Have the claims made for the importance of radio as a means of diffusing agricultural information been borne out? For this, discussion of policy, choice of content and audiences need analysis.

IRB in the models it provides and the organisations which engage in it, is important also because the shape of broadcasting in Third World countries has grown out of the

⁷The history of jamming and banning is interesting, but not relevant here.

⁸The protests of African rulers against the BBC's African Service underline the power of the medium in political affairs.

⁹Religious radio stations are another propaganda use of radio, which may be included in IRB.

systems put in place by colonial, or hegemonic, examples. In Africa, influenced by British and French broadcasting, radio is centrally organised and non-commercial. (Grenfell Williams) Public service broadcasting run by semi-autonomous corporations was the colonial legacy. Although the autonomy was often eroded, the idea that funding should be non-commercial persisted. This in part accounts for the lack of investment in radio, despite its acknowledged power. In the movements towards democratisation, deregulation and privatisation which characterise the late 1990s, this is being challenged, with very mixed results both for plurality of provision and commercial viability.¹⁰

The influence of ex-colonial broadcasting systems is also important because of the organisational structures and physical hardware¹¹ provided for newly independent countries. The professional practices and culture of the former colonial broadcasters have continued to influence radio in Africa, through continued aid and training programmes. There are arguments that IRB exercises a cultural imperialism through provision of programmes for rebroadcast. The debate over electronic imperialism which extends beyond historical links between suppliers and users, to technological dependency, has been revived with the growth of Information Technology (IT). Though some are hopeful that new technology might benefit the Third World (Pool), others fear that Africa will not be able to use IT for wider welfare.

More general debates about the role of media in LDCs are also relevant to IRB. The long battle over freedom of speech and freedom of access has not been resolved. The role of national media in uniting disparate interests within states (developmental journalism) accompanied by censorship and suppression of discussion and dissent, is contrasted with democratic freedoms and professional standards. (McPhail) This is a story which runs and runs. It is of particular interest in Malawi, where there was, and continues to be, explicit use of radio for nation building and the promotion of agricultural production. The concept of mass media as public sphere (Habermas) is weak in Africa. Issues of control over information and access to media are political, but also increasingly concerned with commercial interests (with media mandarins and synergies between media and other commercial interests attracting attention). (Hamelink 1994)

The continued existence of IRB has supplemented the media available within a country, whether this is seen to be a good thing, in providing otherwise unavailable information, or a bad thing because it undermines the status quo.¹² For agricultural information, IRB may not be a means of reaching small farmers, but it may be an effective way of circulating information at a higher level, including the exchange of non-Western knowledge. The old assumptions that this information will trickle down need to be examined empirically.

b - Development Communication

In accordance with the impetus to spread the benefits of modern knowledge and methods as far and as quickly as possible, radio was seen as an ideal means of diffusion. Widely available information would lead to innovation adoption. Dissemination of agricultural

¹⁰In Latin America, on the other hand, the principle of commercial broadcasting was dominant, and there have been interesting forms of programme provision from non-government sources.

¹¹These range from transmitters to tape recorders.

¹²The BBC played a part in the recent transition in Malawi from one party rule to multi party elections.

information was the goal of development communication practitioners and theorists. (McAnny, Melkote, Rogers) Use of metaphors like 'bullet' or 'hypodermic injection' was symptomatic of their belief in the passivity and ignorance of the audience out there, and of their confidence in the validity of the messages transmitted. (McQuail)

Early models of information transfer, like Lasswell's, (1949) were simple transmission models, in which what matters is the sending of a message to a receiver.

Later refinements included a two step process, when it was realised that the mass audience was not homogeneous, or even able individually to hear the messages. The basic premise that messages should consist of modern, western, scientific knowledge remained. (Hornik) The targeting of audiences was developed through such models as Farmers' Clubs, especially in India.

Early studies concentrated on the reasons for adoption or non-adoption of innovations promoted in broadcasts. As in the debates over peasant attitudes, failure was considered to lie at the reception end, among individual listeners. From Latin America came the realisation that context - farmers' situations in the real physical and political world - is important. The need to build into the system some form of feedback, on whether messages were effective in inducing change, used methodologies from market research to gauge performance. It was clear that the transmitting of information needed reinforcement. Additional information could increase the knowledge gap because understanding and adoption depended also on ability to absorb messages - usually related to higher educational levels, status or wealth.¹³ Broadcast information might be necessary but was no longer considered sufficient: packages (including demonstration and access to credit as well as seed and fertiliser) with which to implement the suggested measures, increased the likelihood of adoption. The medium was only one element in persuading farmers to change behaviour. Nor was it the only source of information - informal networks also pass on knowledge. (McQuail, 1994, 1993, Melkote, Rogers)

A central modernizing assumption was the power of the media. The influence of mass media on behaviour is most often discussed with reference to violence - do children learn aggression from cartoons, are murders committed because of TV and films, did radio inflame genocide in Rwanda? The connections are difficult to prove. So too with voting habits, the power of the media is an axiom which leads to expensive campaigns and unreliable results. Yet, despite the difficulty of proof, belief in the power of the mass media persists. Measures of effectiveness have been developed mainly in the field of marketing. It is, however, much easier to count how many bars of soap have been sold than how much cleaner the population is. In agriculture, effects are particularly difficult to prove because agriculture is concerned with growth over time.

The context of reception and the construction of the message are also important matters to study. Feminist analysis demonstrates that people differ not only in their access to messages but also in their "reading" - by class as by gender. Messages can be constructed and interpreted in different ways. (Curran, Fiske, McQuail) Stuart Hall's identification of concurrent codes - dominant, negotiated and oppositional (Hall) - may be useful when applied to agricultural information. Coding and decoding are affected by positions in the

¹³These effects were also important in the ability to benefit from HYV technology.

producer-receiver chain. There are inherent relations of power to be identified, and the language (both discourse and vocabulary) in which agricultural messages are expressed assumes importance. Are the genres (talks, advice, discussions) preferred by experts suitable for the diffusion of information?

Debates over control of the media, and whose interests were served - the establishment's, the organisation's or the public's - developed in the general field of media and communication. In development communication it was recognised that it is difficult to disperse ownership of media to grassroots in an African context. (Pool) Where control of media in Africa is discussed it is usually in the context of freedom of expression. (Stokke, Wedell, Wilcox) The control of agricultural information is also important. In whose interests do gatekeepers chose content? How do organisational factors determine content or effective transmission? (McQuail)

Academic discussion of agricultural development in Africa has concentrated on the subject of how best to extend information to farmers and on the way it has been managed, for instance to the benefit of clients of the powerful, or with a bias towards progressive farmers (usually wealthier men). There is some discussion of who make the best extension agents, and whether male agents reach women farmers. There has been little academic analysis of the detailed content of extension programmes - this has largely been left to practitioners who are concerned with training and logistical problems.(Contado) Whether the information demonstrated reinforces official policies and derives from expert discourse, or whether it responds to farmers'needs has received scant analysis. Criticism of the provision of farming content to men, and home economics courses to women, does suggest that the importance of women as farmers is not fully realised. Some work has been done on extension work in Malawi -the results suggest that women benefit less than men from extension, and that the better-off farmer benefits more than the poorest.

Agricultural extension is usually located within Ministries of Agriculture. It has been concerned with delivering information and also credit facilities. Numerous studies reveal that there is a bias towards men, wealthier farmers and commercial crops. The link to credit has been found unsatisfactory because it excludes those who do not feel able to accept credit (=debt). Radio has been used, and is often seen to have advantages in reaching women (who in Africa are more illiterate, or reluctant¹⁴ to attend training sessions). Radio has been judged cost-effective when compared to visits. But the realities of how many women hear radio, or believe it, or find it relevant remain to be examined.

In educational theory, the understanding that messages need to be meaningful in the receiver's context, has been influenced by Freire. He advocates liberation through education: the gaining of knowledge and understanding is of itself empowering. Functional literacy programmes often use agrarian subjects as their focus. This links up with mainstream communications theory, where the notion of audiences reading texts, of the different interpretations depending as much on the circumstances of the receiver as on the content or means of transmission are clearly relevant to the performance of radio in agricultural development.

Two main problems have been discussed within extension and education agencies: the

¹⁴Or prevented by their circumstances, cultural or economic.

need to include women in the process, and the need to introduce participatory potential.

In step with the general trends suggested in the review of the agricultural literature, two discussions seem most relevant to my research. One concerns the content - is it relevant and does it include indigenous knowledge and experience? The other is concerned with the audience. What is a mass audience - if it breaks down into individuals with particular needs and circumstances¹⁵ - how can a centrally organised medium serve them? Alternative media - community, protest etc. - have evolved in other places. In Africa, because of geography and politics, there are as yet few examples. The experience in Rwanda, where a privately run station fomented disaster and pioneered peripatetic organisation, has not helped. (Prunier) Newer kinds of programming within mainstream, centrally provided broadcasting are also being attempted. They have yet to be evaluated. (INEED listed examples in Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia, there are others in Mali, Nigeria and Senegal)

Within the global framework of regulation and resource allocation - in this case the differing claims on short, medium, long wave spectra, and the contentious topics of satellite and microwave broadcasting (Pool, Reeve) - how radio broadcasting serves agricultural development is a nice question. But in the face of food insecurity, can any tool which might help be ignored?

From this summary review of the literatures, I draw provisional conclusions:

- a** The contribution of women in agriculture has been recognised, but the implications for policy and practice are difficult to address.
- b** Context is an important variable determining how information is selected and how it is received.
- c** Western, scientific, knowledge and methods benefit from local knowledge and practices.
- d** There has been a parallel movement from simple, universal and unidirectional transfers, to understanding that complex, particular and participative models need to be used in agriculture and in communication for development. (Chamber, 1994)
- e** The political economy of institutions at all levels from state to household influences content, behaviour and outcomes.

To discover whether agricultural broadcasting has failed food producers, or suggest reasons for failure, it is necessary to consider messages, transmission, control and reception. By identifying content and how it is selected, media organisation and control, and the perceptions of listeners, I hope to suggest whether 'failure' is a just assessment.

4. Proposed Research Methodology

I propose three levels for analysis - the international, the national and the village - because radio broadcasting in Africa is present at all three levels. The national systems, their

¹⁵I do not think gratifications are at issue here, though use-value may be.

organisations and their infrastructures grew out of the colonial legacy, in broadcasting as in agricultural development. The international level is meaningful in Africa - in a media-poor context, IRB still offers an alternative source of information. The first two levels are concerned with production (though the national level is also a receiver), and the third level, the village, is at the reception end of the classic information model. Literature on agriculture and communications suggests that a linear model should be replaced by a circular one, in which the end user, the food producer, is able to contribute and modify policy. Any model must also take account of exogenous influences (like world prices or politics) and of factors like context and alternative information sources.

The pressing question is how to incorporate the receivers into the production process (or to see to what extent this has been considered, and is possible within the framework of a mass medium).

My proposed research takes the form of three case studies:

- 1 - The British Broadcasting Corporation - representing IRB,
- 2 - Agricultural Broadcasting in Malawi - radio at the national level,
- 3 - Women Farmers in Malawi - representing receivers at the village level.

An examination of each level in the chain from West to South, from macro to micro may yield evidence about how much information trickles down, how the information is filtered, and whether any information passes up the chain. The aim is to provide a study of a systemic process, illustrated by actual examples, which demonstrate realities rather than generalised recommendations of what should work.

- 1 - BBC.

Research into agricultural programmes in the BBC's broadcasts to Africa would ask:

- what priority is given to agricultural programming,
- how are decisions made about these priorities,
- what are the programme contents, where do they come from and what guides the choice of items broadcast,
- who hears the broadcasts, is there any feedback and does this have an effect on content.

Although the BBC broadcasts to Africa in Swahili, Hausa, Somali, French, Portuguese and Kynarwanda¹⁶, I will concentrate on an English language programme heard in Malawi. Through an extended content analysis of *The Farming World*, I hope to observe any changes in content and approach over its 15 years. I would chart topics and language, and trace in particular reference to women farmers. If IRB can provide an exchange of information

¹⁶The question of which languages are used in broadcasting agricultural programmes, and the vocabulary within languages, is important also at the national level. The Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) has broadcast in English and in Chichewa - this has both political and practical implications.

at a high level, does The Farming World act as a clearing house for information coming from Third World experience?

The question of who the audience is - as envisaged by the broadcasters, and discovered by audience research - can also be investigated via data collected by the BBC, and interviews with listeners.

I have made arrangements and obtained official permission to conduct this research.

Methodological techniques:

- data collection and analysis,
- structured and unstructured interviews, with managers, producers and listeners,
- questionnaires,
- archive searches.

This will result in a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data, from which some answers to the questions may be derived.

2 - Malawi.

I believe Malawi is an interesting national level exemplar because it has had, perforce, a stable political regime for 30 years from Independence to recent multi-party elections. Authoritarian government recognised the centrality of agriculture, but managed resources and economics in such a way that food surplus was changed to deficit. Allowing for unfavourable exogenous factors like drought and the war in Mozambique,¹⁷ there are clear indications that state manipulation of land, labour and crop production resulted in increased income for a few and increased insecurity for the many. Malawi is one of the few countries without television, and it is therefore feasible to suppose that radio agricultural programmes may be a source of information for rural people.

Starting with an account of the post-Independence experience of agricultural development and broadcasting in Malawi, I would ask the same questions as of the BBC. The relationship between the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) and the Government is, however, different. Soon after Independence, MBC passed from semi-autonomy to direct government control. It is modelled on the publicly funded public service model of the BBC, but funding via licence collection has never been a viable option. It has limited income from advertising. The market for consumer goods in Malawi has not been large enough to attract advertising investment, so there is dependence on direct grant and donor funding, with implications for political control and underinvestment. Will agricultural development programmes survive in a brave new commercial world where

"radio which often reaches larger audiences than print media and TV, is clearly a major advertising vehicle, certainly in countries where both TV and the print media have only a very limited reach." (Reeves, p164)

I intend to collect data about MBC's facilities and agricultural programmes, and to

¹⁷It is to Malawi's credit that it absorbed 1 million refugees despite its own poverty. The influx caused additional hardships but little civil resistance. The refugees have now returned to Mozambique.

interview managers and producers. This is a sensitive area, but I am hopeful that access will be possible. I already have some knowledge of MBC's history.

Agricultural extension by radio has long existed in Malawi -it is the responsibility of the Agricultural Communication Branch of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development. There have been studies of it which have concluded variously - that it is cost effective (Perraton), a neglected resource, used as a sop to smallholders while better services were provided for estate sector. The Extension programme has been found to fail women, in its institutional biases and its delivery record.

I would collect data to bring information about the MBC and radio extension up to date. In particular, I will try to describe the content of messages, and whether they were determined by national policy with its emphasis on export earnings, or by food security needs. Most of the available work on extension is concerned with training personnel and structure, rather than with content. (Biggs) I would do content analysis on a small selection of programmes.¹⁸

The experience in Malawi, with Farmers' Clubs or listening groups needs to be examined - how widespread has their use been and who attended them, with what success? Most extension effort was aimed at farmers in large-scale Integrated Schemes, and has been said to benefit the relatively better off. Were radio broadcasts linked to such extension programmes, or did they cater to other poorer farmers? Besides radio, what other channels may have delivered information to women?

There is some audience research data in Malawi which may be examined. Most fundamentally, perhaps, there is the question of whether women actually hear messages from official sources. Simply, but importantly, are available figures of radio sets/population realistic, and do women have access to them?

I have access to and agreements with people in UK who have experience of radio in Malawi from Independence to the present, and a certain amount of data collection and interviewing is already assured. In Malawi there is a new national interest in improving extension to the poorest women farmers. I am corresponding with a lecturer in Agricultural Extension at Bunda College who is interested in a collaborative project on the impact of radio, and who will assist in getting research clearance.

Methodological techniques:

- data collection and analysis,
- extended interviews, structured and unstructured,
- questionnaires,
- archive searches.

3 - Women Farmers.

This is the most difficult level to plan, but I would aim to build on previous studies of

¹⁸While most agricultural programmes are made by the Extension agency and broadcast through on the national carrier, MBC also produces discussion programmes, interviews and other programmes which have agricultural content.

women farmers in the Southern Region, for instance, that of Hirschmann and Vaughan. The South is where conditions are best for food crop production: it is therefore under pressure to increase productivity. Population density is high in Malawi, and especially in the Southern region. Land is also unevenly distributed between the large estate sector (producing commercial crops of tea and sugar¹⁹) which has been developed through favourable terms of trade and employment, at the expense of the smallholder sector which has been expected to maximise maize production without increasing land planted to maize. There is a history of exclusion of smallholders from growing the more profitable tobacco, and smallholders' maize has been bought at artificially low prices. The pressure on land throughout Malawi, and the low returns to labour on estates has always meant migration of adult men from family farming. The burden of food production, and a shortage of land, labour and cash, has fallen on women farmers. Chichewa is spoken in the central and Southern region: as until recently broadcasts were only in Chichewa or English, it is reasonable to conduct research there.²⁰ Ideally I would like to compare a group of women farmers who have received radio messages, with one which had not. I envisage a very small number of individuals.

I would expect to ask a range of questions:

- how many radio sets are there (in working order), what is the cost, and who controls their use,
- can women (or other farmers) recall broadcast information,
- how useful/interesting/appropriate/credible was it,
- what would they like to hear, what sort of programme and what sort of information,
- what other sources of information are available? Which influences are important in decisions - labour, cash needs, land, credit and example.

Methodological techniques:

- rapid rural appraisal,
- survey and interview,
- diaries,
- focus groups,
- participatory research.

¹⁹The main export crop, tobacco, is mainly grown and processed in the more Northern parts of Malawi.

²⁰The new regime is encouraging broadcasts in other languages.

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