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BREAKING THE SILENCE: HOW COMMUNITY RADIO ENGAGES LISTENING CLUBS

A CASE STUDY OF MUDZI WATHU COMMUNITY RADIO

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A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of the University of Witwatersrand's Masters by Coursework and Research Report in Journalism and media studies.

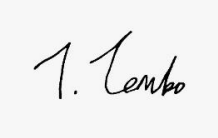
Johannesburg, April 2021

Abstract

In Malawi, research suggests that community radio has empowered communities by giving them a chance to express themselves. The community radio has provided a platform for people who have been marginalised by mainstream media to be heard which encourages audience participation. One of the ways in which community radio engages the audience is through Radio Listening Clubs (RLCs). This research explores the extent to which RLCs promote active listenership through community radio. It looks at how they promote participation amongst the members, what they discuss and how the discussion occurs as well as what kind of publics they create and how these align with the overall objectives of community radio. It explores these issues by interviewing members of various RLCs and members of staff of Mudzi Wathu community radio, which this research uses as a case study. The findings of the study are then discussed in the context of public sphere and agenda setting theories. The research finds that RLCs are more than "listening groups", they have become platforms where ordinary people in the communities discuss issues that affect them, leading to action and policy changes. RLCs have also opened up a space for marginalised groups in society, like women, to discuss issues that affect them and take part in development projects in their area. With little to no interference from the community radio, RLCs are independent and act on agendas that are beneficial to their communities. The research suggests that community radio serves as a catalyst for action in the community through RLCs. On the other hand, RLCs can also influence the content on the community radio and use it to support their community engagement activities, at the same time, use it as a way to hold those in power to account through setting the broadcast agenda.

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts by Coursework and Research Report, in the Department of Journalism, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.



Tisaukirenji Tembo

26th day of April 2021

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to the Tembo family; my parents and siblings who are always supportive in all my academic endeavours.

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I would like to thank my supervisor, Alan Finlay whose guidance made this research project possible. I would like to extend my gratitude to Lesley Cowling, my family and friends who helped make this academic journey possible. Further appreciation goes to Mudzi Wathu community radio and radio listening clubs for their contribution to this research.

Abbreviations

ADCs	Area Development Committees
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
CMCs	Community Media Clubs
CDF	Community Development Fund
CRECCOM	Creative Centre for Community Mobilization
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GM	Genetically Modified
HC4L	Health Communication for All
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
MACRA	Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority
MBC	Malawi Broadcasting Corporation
MP	Member of Parliament
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
RLCs	Radio Listening Clubs
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
TA	Tradition Authority
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VDCs	Village Development Committees
WFP	World Food Programme
ZBS	Zodiak Broadcasting Station

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

In recent years, community radio has risen as an essential media for the rural majority in Malawi. This is due to the influence of non-profit international organisations that have established these radio stations to empower marginalised groups (Chikaipa and Gunde, 2020). The so-called "third form" of broadcasting after public and commercial has been credited with providing a forum for locals who are excluded in mainstream media to take part in creating media content, as well as participating in discussions on issues that affect them (Alhassan et al, 2011). For a developing nation like Malawi, there is limited access to services like electricity and the internet, this means few people are able to have televisions and access the internet. The radio is more affordable to a majority of people, hence, it is the most effective mass communication tool (Manyozo, 2005).

Tabing (2006) defines community radio "as radio in, for, about and by the community". Locals in the community have a chance to be a part of the radio station and take part in broadcasting, programming and discussions leading to solutions to local problems.

> It aims for an interactive information and communication system in the locality. More than recognising the legitimate functions of radio; to inform, educate and mobilise the community, the initiators maintained that community members should be active participants in the exchange of thoughts, feelings and information. They emphasize on the need for people to be able to initiate ideas and to engage in dialogue with their leaders. Thus, it is in achieving democratic communication that the people would be part of the dynamic community (Tabing, 2006, p.151)

In Malawi, the history of community radio dates back to 1998 after the introduction of the Communications Act and the establishment of the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA), which regulates functions of the communications sector. Before then, Malawi had been under one-party rule for 30 years, and the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) was the only broadcaster (Manjawira and Mitunda, 2011).

The Communications Act of 2016 (revised version) remains vague on policy when it comes to community radio. The Act expects the community radio to; operate on a non-profit basis, serve the interests of the community and promote the participation of the people in the community. It does not go into detail on how they should go about it, so different community radios have their own policies according to their license agreement (Communications Act, 2016).

Since the establishment of the first licensed community radio, Dzimwe, in Mangochi (established by the Malawi Media Women Association as a "women only" radio station), Malawi now has over 45 community radio stations, some geographical (based on geographical location), some based on interest (based on issues of focus, for instance; religion and agriculture) (Chikaipa and Gunde, 2020).

During the one-party era, the state restricted the independence of the media. Language was also restricted to English and Chichewa thereby excluding audiences from other indigenous languages (Manjawira and Mitunda, 2011). The use of other indigenous languages in community radio has enabled Malawians who cannot converse in the national languages to join in public discussions, lessening the language barrier.

In comparison to mainstream media, community radio operates at a low cost, reaches members of the community in their own local languages and maximises the potential for development within the community (Manjawira and Mitunda, 2011).

Today, nothing has changed as most of the broadcasters, both private and public, use English and Chichewa as their main languages.

Marginalised audiences can now access and participate in community radio and become a part of its own public. Apart from taking part in broadcasting through phone-in programmes, Radio Listening Clubs (RLCs) are one way in which the audience participates in community media.

> A RLC is a small listening and discussion group that meets regularly to receive a special radio programme, which the members then discuss (Manyozo, 2007, p.13)

In his study, "Transforming the lives of ordinary people in Malawi through radio listening clubs" Mhagama, (2015) notes that RLCs can be used to transform people's lives as participants share knowledge and help each other to alleviate poverty by getting access to information, farm inputs and loans (organisations usually reach out to the communities through the already formed groups).

The members of staff of the radio station help in organising these groups and provide equipment like recorders to enable them to record programmes and their discussions. The group setting is important as it helps those with low literacy levels to interact with others and have discussions that could help them. Instead of just listening to the radio and conducting discussions, the groups have also taken on other roles, such as introducing village banks where members are able to access loans.

The idea behind RLCs in Malawi is not a new phenomenon as it came from a similar concept as of RLCs known as farmers' listening forums in the 1960s.

These farmers' forums started in 1940 in Canada, during the Second World War. These forums aimed at promoting the participation of farmers in development projects. They then spread to other countries, such as India in 1949 and Ghana in 1964. These aimed at conducting adult education and encouraged communities to develop themselves. They further spread to Malawi, Tanzania and Senegal (Berrigan, 1979; Flor, 1995; Lewis and Booth, 1989; Mackie, 1971 cited in Mhagama, 2015).

Some scholars have criticised the term "listening" clubs. According to Manda (2015), members of these clubs work on multiple media activities such as "newsgathering, sound editing, producing

and critical reviewing". All these activities need to be incorporated in the term as the author suggests calling them Community Media Clubs (CMCs).

This research focuses on Mudzi Wathu community radio as a case study and considers how RLCs promote participation among its listenership. It falls under audience research, and is important because the main objective of community radio is to help the marginalised groups have a space where they can express themselves. The findings of this research will help to evaluate the contribution of community radio in creating an inclusive space and enabling communities in being a part of the decision making process in Malawi, which outside of this research process, can inform policy change where necessary. This could lead to more inclusive and empowered communities, and encourage the meaningful use of community radios in these communities.

1.1 Mudzi Wathu community radio

Established in 2006, Mudzi Wathu, which translates to "our community", started through a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) project, implemented by Creative Centre for Community Mobilization (CRECCOM) to tackle social issues in Mchinji and surrounding districts. With its slogan "mouthpiece for grassroots", the radio's mission is to encourage community dialogue and active participation of audiences to address issues that affect them. It also allows a space for decision-makers and the community to interact.

It broadcasts in Chewa and Senga languages. The indigenous Senga is commonly used when trading with neighbouring Zambia, (the station is located in a border district, close to Zambia and Mozambique, hence, Senga is used as a language of interaction among traders from the three countries) which gives an opportunity to those outside the border to be a part of this community interaction (Chikaipa and Gunde, 2020).

According to the Mudzi Wathu website, the community radio station has a listenership of 1.5 million, and caters for tribes such as the Chewa and Ngoni. It is located in Central Malawi, which is a bedrock of agriculture, with tobacco (Malawi's biggest export) being a common crop in the area.

Mudzi Wathu has 42 RLCs across the districts of Mchinji, Kasungu, Dowa and Lilongwe where it operates. However, not all of these are active.

1.2 Aim

The aim of this research is to explore the extent to which RLCs promote participation among members (who are listeners of community radio) of Mudzi Wathu community radio. This will be conducted through a series of group and individual interviews with staff and members of the RLCs. The aim is to determine who participates in RLCs meetings, the topics that are discussed, what spaces the meetings create and the extent to which RLCs can influence programming content at the radio station. Through this, I hope to determine the kind of publics created by the RLCs, and the extent to which they support the participatory aim of community radio stations in general.

1.3 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are:

- To understand the structures and processes of the RLCs and how these relate to the community radio.

- To identify what type of publics RLCs create and how they support the objectives of community radio.

1.4 Rationale for the study

With community radio, the biggest beneficiary is the community in which the radio is situated. If community radio exists for the poor and marginalised, then it should be able to let them express themselves on issues that affect them.

According to Sharma (2011), community radio is an important tool in development communication that also empowers marginalised groups excluded in the mainstream media. Some of these marginalised groups include women, youth and children.

> Walfer and Dhanarajan (2009) stated that community radio is an immensely powerful technology for the delivery of education with enormous global potential reach. They added that the strength of radio includes the following: (1) Community radio reaches a wider audience than any other medium; (2) It can motivate people by building audio/oral traditions and stimulate the imagination better than video or television; (3) Community radio program is cheaper to make as compared to television and video. Balit (2009) concluded that community radio is a practical and creative medium for facilitating the education and empowerment of the poor including women and youth (Cited in Sharma and Kashyap, 2015, p.182)

Community radio has created a platform in which diverse groups in the community can express themselves. One way to achieve this is through audience participation. Since one of the challenges to participation in the broader public domain is language, community radio's use of local and indigenous languages in broadcast has increased the number of people in its audience. However, audience participation has to be done right for it to be effective (Chikaipa and Gunde, 2020).

According to Mchakulu (2007), community radio helps link the community with government officials and other stakeholders on projects initiated by the RLCs. As a result, these stakeholders have provided essential services such as agriculture, education and health in these communities.

This shows how influential these interactions can be. However, despite multiple research on RLCs in Malawi, such as their influence, empowerment and contribution to development communication, there is a gap in an in-depth look on how their deliberations occur and how much the community radio is involved in this process.

If community radio exists for the people in the community, it is important to explore who and how these people are involved in the discussions hence the need for this type of audience research.

1.5 Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following question: To what extent do RLCs promote the participation of communities in community radio?

I will locate this question within the context of public sphere theory and against the policy background of the importance of community radio for access to information, providing a voice for communities, and participation in development activities. In doing so, I hope to answer the following broader questions: Do RLCs encourage an active, empowered listenership? What sort of publics do they create amongst the participating listeners? How do these publics support the objectives of community radio?

The specific questions I will ask are as follows:

- How are RLCs structured?
- What are their stated goals?
- Who participates and how do they participate? (Particular attention will be paid to demographics such as age and gender of the participants)
- How often do they meet? For how long? What do they discuss?
- How do they select topics for discussion?
- What sort of topics do they discuss? What extent are the topics relevant to the community?
- Is the community radio involved in their discussions?
- What is the extent to which RLCs report to the station?
- To what extent do RLCs influence radio programming?

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Definition of community radio

There is no single definition of community radio. Different scholars (Tabing, 2006; Nirmala 2015, cited in Fombad and Jiyane, 2016; Al Hassan et al, 2011) have come up with different ways to define community radio. However, one common element is that community radio is for the marginalised people in society.

> The term "community radio" has somewhat different meanings in different countries. It is considered to be third-tier broadcasting besides public and private radio broadcasting, which is managed, run and controlled by a community for the benefit of the community and is supposed to serve the interests and aspirations of the community (Nirmala, 2015, cited in Fombad and Jiyane, 2016, p.49)

Community radio operates on a non-profit basis and serves the people's interests in the community within which the radio station operates.

> The community media is, therefore, the media that gives the communities a voice, provides the communities with information on issues that they are interested to know. This media discusses community issues using examples that are familiar to the general local community. It provides "spaces for people to discuss, and debate issues" that their community is interested in (Deane, 2007, cited in Nafiz, 2012, p.26)

As public and commercial radios cater mostly for the elite, community radio strives to serve the interests of the poor communities by empowering and giving them a say in issues that affect them.

> Community radio is a type of radio service that offers a model of radio broadcasting beyond commercial and public service. Community radio broadcasting serves geographic communities and communities' interest. The content of broadcasting is largely popular and relevant to a local/ specific audience but may be overlooked by commercial or mass media broadcasters. Community radio stations are operated, owned, and driven by the communities they serve. Community radio is not-for-profit and provides a mechanism for facilitating individuals, groups, and communities to tell their own diverse stories, to share experiences, and in a media rich world to become active creators and contributors of media (Al Hassan et al, 2011, p.1)

According to Banda (2003) and Lingela (2008) (cited in Al Hassan and Faisal, 2018), when community radio is well utilised, it is an important tool that can be used to advance development processes, as well as hold those in power accountable for their actions and encourage transparency.

2.2 Characteristics of community radio

Due to lack of funds to start a radio station, most of the community radio stations in Malawi have a history of beginnings with help from NGOs who provide the broadcasting equipment, train local staff and hand over the radio to the community after a certain period of operation. The influence of these NGOs does not stop there as they have a presence in the programming. A majority of community radio programmes are developmental and often sponsored by these NGOs (Mwale, 2010; Mhagama, 2016).

In his study on access and participation in community radio in three countries of New Zealand, Nepal and Sri Lanka, Nafiz 2012 noted that the three case studies all had different ownership structures. In New Zealand, the community radio was owned by the community (not surprising for a developing country), the Nepal radio was under an NGO and the one in Sri Lanka was under the state broadcaster.

Although NGOs have helped establish most community radios, some countries like India have given them so much power. Every community radio in India has to be owned and operated by an NGO or similar organisations to advance development goals. This has the potential to turn these community radios into a tool for these organisations to fulfil their objectives but leaving out the community in the process (Malik, 2007, cited in Nafiz, 2012).

With its attributes of serving specific groups of people that national media do not reach out to, some describe community radio as "an alternative media".

> ….alternative media includes all forms of small-scale communication (mediums) that are seen as "more accessible and participatory, and less constrained by bureaucracy or commercial interests than the mainstream media and often in some way in explicit opposition to them" (Coyer et al., 2007, cited in Nafiz, 2012, p.25)

2.3 Audience Participation

Access and participation are the two major tenets of community radio (Sow, 2014). The people in the communities should be able to have access to the radio, as well as be able to participate in discussions on issues affecting them on and off air.

> By access, community radio stations generally mean that they provide time and space for all members of the community to speak, to discuss issues of social, political, and economic importance, and to hear voices of dissent or of marginalised peoples. Access and participation are key elements of community radio. The main goal of community radio is to give voice to the voiceless, which are, generally speaking, poor, marginalised groups of society. Therefore, community radio seeks to establish ways not only of providing information to local communities, but also in putting them at the forefront of the activities of the community radio station: the management, programming and content production. In other words, the community member is not just a listener, but also a producer, a participant, a resource person that can provide information, financial and material assistance, among

other contributions. Participation can take a variety of forms, including the set-up of formal mechanisms such as listening groups, local correspondents or reporters, or allocation of airtime (Sow, 2014, p 12-13).

Audience participation comes in different forms. Carpentier (2011) cited in Faisal and Alhassan (2018) groups audience participation into two types: participation in media and participation through media. The first participation is associated with programming and management related issues, while the other participation deals with the involvement of the audience in dialogue, a category to which RLCs belong.

Carpentier further categorises participation into two levels: minimal and maximist. In minimal participation, media professionals have so much control over the participation process that one would wonder whether the audience participation exists. In this case, participants believe that decision-makers consider their perspectives in development interventions. However, in reality, they are not. In maximist participation, the audience is democratically allowed to participate in dialogue and debates on various issues. Decision-makers consider the audience perspectives, unlike in minimalist approach.

Chikaipa and Gunde (2020) note that community radio's ability to use minority languages makes it easy for the audience to understand information and enable participation. This is because most people communicate easily through their mother tongue. With mainstream media often using "national languages", it excludes those who cannot relate to those languages.

2.4 Participation through listening clubs

Listening clubs are one of the ways in which community radio engages with its audiences outside the common talk radio programmes that involve the audience calling in to live broadcasts and taking part in discussions on air. These types of broadcasts, act as a way of engaging the audience, but are limited to only those who have access to phones and can afford airtime to make a call. According to Australian studies by Barlow (2002) (cited in Nafiz, 2012), access to producing and participating in such programmes is often restricted by management as they prefer participants with similar ideas to theirs over those with opposing opinions. Hence these listening clubs are a much more affordable and accessible way of engaging the communities without such interferences (Al Hassan and Faisal, 2018).

In India, according to Nafiz (2012), the community radio that was under the government attempted to engage the community by using an E Tuk Tuk (three-wheeled rickshaw), which was a donor-funded project. The radio staff would go to the community to meet and interview people for their programmes. The station did not have phone in or live in-studio programmes, and this was attributed to most of the community being farmers and being available in the evenings. However, they did have a listener's club, which met once every three months. The club also held meetings with the radio station where they would give suggestions on future programming.

In the case of radio Gindiku (one of the four women's community radio) in Senegal, the listening of programmes is a minor aspect of its 60 listening clubs. They meet twice a month on average, and the listening aspect happens more on an individual than group basis.

> Their main activities are discussions and dialogue, advocacy, and discussions on the topics broadcast on the radio. The discussions focus on, among other things, leadership, health, education, women's rights and duties, the socialisation of the girl child, elections, the work of women reporters, life in village communities, women's income-generating activities, women's access to local decision-making bodies, and the radio programs. Dialogue is the activity that listening groups conduct more frequently (Sow, 2014).

The clubs are also involved in "home visits" where they meet local leaders to discuss issues of community interest as well as the group's activities. They also meet women with personal problems and offer them advice and solutions; hence the clubs give the women a platform which they can depend on and build friendships in the process.

> These visits provide a space for dialogue with local leaders and local organisations to discuss issues of interests for the participants. Access to land, the use of mosquito nets, children's education, politics and local elections, leadership, and gender and development were some of the topics discussed by listening groups in the month before the survey. By targeting community organisations, the listening group intends to mobilise local stakeholders to strengthen the radio's efforts in advocating that the authorities find solutions to the problems discussed. The end goal is to sensitise the highest possible number of people and to have a critical mass of people who can influence decision-making (Gueye, 2012 cited in Sow 2014, p.226).

2.5 Understanding listening clubs

In Malawi, RLCs emerged in 1966 after the country attained its independence. During this time, they were known as "farmers' forum" listening groups (Mackie, 1971 cited in Mhagama, 2015). This was a way of curbing "one way broadcasting" and promoting participatory development especially through agriculture.

According to Banda (2007), the concept of "listening" clubs is 'misleading because RLCs go beyond just listening to the radio. This concept, suggests RLCs as passive audience, when in reality, they are active.

> It masks the fact that the audience is actively involved in the processes of producing the programmes. It hides the fact that the audience is engaged in the production of meaning, and the communicating of that meaning to other societal actors – the policy makers, ordinary citizens, et cetera. The clubs play a dual role – technically producing their own programmes and socially producing their own definitions or meanings of development. The process of production does not preclude "listening". Therefore, while "listening" is, in

> itself, an objective of the clubs, there is a much more involved process of programme production (Banda, 2007, p.132).

A common way of engaging the people in community radios is that of RLCs found in the majority of these communities. Entry to RLCs is voluntary, and the number of members seems to differ according to different areas. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), there is no limitation to how many members a club can take. Although it has been emphasised that the higher the number of people in a club, the more difficult it is for a large group to listen to a radio set (Food and Agriculture Organization-Dimitra Project, 2011).

In Malawi, according to Mchakulu (2007), RLCs have a range of 13-57 members; Manyozo (2007) talks about the groups having 12 members (he mentions that it is the same with Ghana and India) while Mhagama (2015) mentions that RLCs having 25 members is the original figure but due to willingness of the community, the number changes. This shows that there is no uniformity when it comes to the number of members in these groups.

> …..each RLC has about twelve members, consisting of a chairperson, vice-chairperson, monitor, secretary, treasurer and regular members. The clubs operate on a constitution-like set of Chichewa (local language) guidelines, which are principles on how to conduct discussions, manage the groups and coordinate development activities with other grassroots organisations (Manyozo, 2007, p.17)

RLCs are supposed to have specific goals and operate under set guidelines. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Dimitra project states that RLCs are centred on the community and have the following goals:

- To generate information, promote local knowledge and encourage information sharing, especially to benefit communities with limited access to the media.
- To use radio to prompt community members, both women and men, to take part in development activities/projects at local level.
- To enable women and men in the community to express themselves freely on issues of community interest, and to play an active and voluntary role in undertaking concerted initiatives as a response. (FAO-Dimitra 2011, p.40)

RLCs have created a space for community members to participate in decision making in their areas. In this approach, all members of the community are involved in "debates and deliberation" on different issues affecting their communities without any bias when it comes to age, gender and social status, which could lead to behaviour change among the participants (Mchakulu, 2007). RLCs do not operate in a vacuum but are connected to a particular community radio (there are also RLCs in mainstream radio). The community radio is involved in a number of ways: linking RLCs with stakeholders and providing equipment to the RLCs.

> The community radio station provides the radio listening clubs with the equipment they need to record their debate for later broadcasts, including a portable cassette recorder, tapes or cassettes, as well as training in the use of the equipment. The radio station also acts as the link among the various radio listening clubs, and club members spend a vast amount of their time listening to the debates and deliberations of other clubs. This provides the clubs with discussion points, thus helping them to learn from other communities (Mchakulu, 2007, p.255).

Alumuku (2006) (cited in Muloongo, 2011, p.121), states that "specific problems can be analysed, remedies discussed, and those affected or who can help with solutions, mobilise to collective action". In this way, community radio gives the audience, through RLCs, a platform to discuss issues affecting them. In some instances, the problems are solved, while in some, they are not.

For instance, one RLC in Malawi logged a complaint about a group of people who were buying maize (Malawi's staple food) at the local market in bulk and reselling for higher prices. The issue reached the Minister of Agriculture, who addressed the problem. This proves the power that discussions within RLCs hold.

> The knowledge that policy-making elites - governmental and non-governmental – would respond to their concerns gave the club members a sense of dialogic engagement. They were contributing to local and national discussions about the kinds of issues that they cared about. The clubs provided a channel through which they could contact the hitherto "amorphous" centres of social, political, and economic power almost on a co-equal basis, and challenge them on questions regarding their "own" development. This dialogic exchange enabled them to "converse," from a position of collective power, with those they would otherwise not meet in person (Banda, 2007, p.145).

A similar scenario happened in Nkhotakota district where the community lacked access to free antenatal services that government clinics provide. They were forced to go to a private clinic, which most women could not afford. One RLC called in the Member of Parliament for the area as well as the Minister of Health to discuss the lack of government intervention in providing these services. In the end, the government had an agreement with the private clinic to offer free antenatal services in the area, which the government would pay for as a project to build them a clinic was in the works (Sisya, 2005, cited in Manyozo, 2007).

In this way, RLCs have created a space where the community can come together to discuss issues of public concern that affect them, that includes questioning established powers to bring solutions to their problems, just like in Habermas' idea of a public sphere. RLCs have also enabled the people to come together within the jurisdiction of the community radio itself to have a space for their participation in discussions in which they are mostly left out as demonstrated by Fraser's idea

of counter publics. Participation is a bedrock of community radio. However, the audience has to be involved in the discussions and their voices have to be heard in reality and not just on paper. If community radio is for the people, it is important to explore how it promotes participation of the community through RLCs, how these groups hold their discussions and their engagement with community radio and how they contribute to participatory democracy.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses the theories of public sphere and agenda setting as well as their relevance to this research.

3.1 Public Sphere

According to Habermas (1989), idea of the media as a public sphere is that of a space where citizens could come together and critique those in power. The idea suggests one mass public sphere. He argues that the space is to open to all citizens, meaning everyone can participate in these discussions. Habermas (1989) adds that this public sphere brackets all social inequalities and brings people together to deliberate as peers.

However, his idea has been criticised by other scholars like Fraser (1992), who argues that Habermas' public sphere is only for the "bourgeois" and it excludes some marginalised groups in terms of gender and social status, such as women and children.

According to Fraser (1992), it is not possible to bracket social inequalities as if they do not exist as it favours dominant groups and neglects subordinate groups in society. She adds that in this public sphere, the media which is in charge of circulating views, are private and operate for profit thereby making access a barrier to equal participation. Fraser adds that in the Habermas' public sphere, the issues discussed were regarded as public matters, however, this only benefited dominant groups and not other participants who might have had other issues to deliberate on, but were regarded as minor by the wider public.

Fraser (1992) argues against Habermas' idea of a unitary public, which excluded marginalised groups. She suggests a public sphere that suits a democratic society. Some of the crucial questions raised by Fraser include; "Who speaks? Who is silent? How are topics selected? How are they covered? How is public opinion translated into social action? How is the debate managed?" (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994, p.34).

According to Fraser (1992), the idea of a singular public is imaginary. She argues that there are other publics, that form outside wider publics, and this widens the space for deliberations. She calls these publics, counter publics. Those who are excluded from Habermas' public (the dominant public) on the basis of gender, race, nationality, age, sexual orientation, et cetera regroup to form their own publics where they can discuss issues.

Mchakulu (2007) states that RLCs fall in a public sphere, which is free from the state, and one that promotes democratic deliberations. It is safe to say he agrees with Fraser.

> RLCs, however, present the local citizenry with a public sphere that is free of state interference and encourages the idea of democratic debate. Nevertheless, for genuine democratic debate to take place, citizens must be informed, capable of arguing and actively

> organised as a transformative political force. Thus, Habermas can be criticised for limiting his description of an ideal public sphere to the process of rational argumentation and consensus. (Mchakulu, 2007, pp.253-254)

Mhagama (2015) notes that RLCs provide a space for participation in debates and that they have "some" traits of a public sphere which he describes as "highly mediated and managed". He calls RLCs "alternative public spheres".

According to O'Brien (2019), the main agenda of community radio is democratic participation. However, O'Brien notes that women are under-represented in community radio, and there is no solution in sight. With community radio in Malawi, the origins seem to be in favour of Fraser's idea of a public sphere. The first community radio, Dzimwe, was established by women and catered for women who were excluded from the mainstream media discourse.

> When Dzimwe community radio station was being established in 1998, its RLCs were composed of women only because they were considered voiceless, marginalised and exploited economically more than men. Therefore, the station was established with an aim of empowering women economically as well as socially. However, it was later realised that it was not appropriate and equitable to exclude men from the clubs. As such, RLCs that were inclusive of boys, girls, women and men, were also established (Panos, 2011 cited in Mhagama 2015, p.42).

From this example, the idea to be inclusive also excluded other groups of people who were later added to these RLCs. According to Chirwa et al (2000) (cited in Manyozo, 2007), women are the majority in RLCs membership, but they were less vocal. The author attributed it to the longer time that was given to "experts/service providers" during the meetings. As the community radio acts as a link between these people and RLCs, sometimes they come to the meetings to address issues with the RLCs and, in the process, take up more of the locals' time to express themselves. This brings in questions of how much power do RLCs have in the discussions and how much power the community radio has on the RLCs.

In RLCs, a facilitator is in charge of how the discussions take place. It is not known whether the group or the community radio chooses this facilitator. Since each group listens to a particular programme, there are groups on health, agriculture et cetera, this means each RLC can be a public on its own. However, there is a need to find out if the RLC makes its own public or a public within a public (the community radio they fall under).

Warner defines a public as a space that exists because of a relationship to circulated texts. The people in Warner's public do not have to know each other and they can be strangers. They also have a sense of belonging and any attempt at barring this public "leads people to feel powerless and frustrated."

> A public organises itself independently of state institutions, law, formal frameworks of

> citizenship or pre-existing institutions, such as the church (Warner, 2002, p.51).

Membership in RLCs is voluntary and they share a common interest of listening to the same programme, which can be categorised as audio text.

According to Mwale (2006), debate becomes public when an issue is brought into an "open forum" that is available and accessible to all. He gives an example of the debate on genetically modified (GM) maize provided by the United Nations (UN) World Food Programme (WFP) to a number of countries in Southern Africa that were facing hunger. While other countries accepted the GM maize, a debate arose in Zambia on whether it was healthy and if it should be accepted.

The Zambian government launched a countrywide consultation mostly through meetings and the media, although the government-owned media covered less on the topic. However, Mwale notes that there was a form of social deliberation, which can categorise this as a public debate, which was open to all.

> Societal deliberation broadly covers interactive communication or discursive exchange of views on issues of general concern or interest. To this end, societal deliberation can take several forms such as talking, consulting, conversing, reading, writing, listening, or visualising. This entails that each communication form has a mode of addressability that generates or at least expects a response from the (real or imagined) addressee, or else all we have is monologue. Societal deliberation occurs in several domains such as village or area development committees, town councils, city assemblies, theatre, film, radio, television, newspapers, or music. The criterion here is "interaction" or "exchange" (Mwale, 2006, p.92).

According to Mwale (2006), this form of consultation had both traits of Habermas' public sphere, where the public was involved in "physically organised debate" as well as Warner's public, which was "mediated" and the people were brought together through the circulation of texts in the media and they did not have to know each other.

The idea behind community radio is the provision of a space for subordinate groups excluded in the wider public which is the national media. However, RLCs have emerged from community radio as multiple spaces where participants can deliberate on various issues. This study seeks to look into these spaces and how these deliberations happen.The theories and concepts described above are relevant in identifying what type of publics RLCs are, what they discuss and how the discuss their issues.

3.2 Agenda Setting

The agenda setting theory suggests that the media influence what people talk about, thus, they set the agenda of what people should discuss. RLCs work under a particular community radio, and as discussed earlier, theses stations provide equipment and link RLCs to experts or service providers who join some of the discussions. Since the groups meet up and listen to a particular programme,

and conduct discussions afterwards, questions arise on how the programmes and topics of discussion are selected.

> Members have the responsibility for setting the agenda for their debates. Any club member can table a burning issue for discussion. The secretary records the tabled items, and if there are too many items to be discussed in one sitting, the chairperson, in consultation with the secretary, can decide which ones to leave out. In most instances, however, the chairperson simply reads out the items on the agenda to the club members, who then vote on which ones to discuss (Mchakulu, 2007, p.255).

According to Ngugi and Kinyua (2014:6), "community radio promotes community agenda and interests against other competing interests." The authors describe the agenda setting theory as one that enables the media to influence the topics that appear on the public agenda. This is done through covering an item multiple times which in the end is regarded as important by the audience.

Mwangi et al (2018) also notes that the media is able to influence what issues are regarded as important through the ways in which they present those issues to the public.

> The media not only informs the audience on what issues are important by highlighting them in terms of content, frequency, positioning, duration and timing but also influences their behaviour (Mwangi et al, 2018:75)

In their research on the relationship between the use of vernacular in programming and public participation, Mwangi et al (2018) found that the use of local languages encouraged participation from the audience and in the process the audience was able to set their own agenda through the discussions.

Zain (2014) acknowledges that to some extent, the media follows the agendas of the public or audience. The media derives such agendas from ratings and audience research. In this way, they are able to identify what issues the audience is interested in.

However, the media has been criticised for encouraging inequality by promoting certain issues over others, which the media regards as of "public interest". The media is also known for selecting particular people to take part in public deliberations to suit their agenda.

As most of the community radio station in Malawi have origins of being established by donors, the question of donors influence also arises. Are the community radios free of interference from their donors? Who sets the agenda for discussions? Does this affect the RLCs?

> In donor-funded or operated community radio stations, participation is, to varying degrees, influenced by donors. Although this has potential of encouraging community engagement and development, people's participation is potentially reduced and some commentators question whether participation in such contexts is genuine (Bessette, 2004 cited in Mhagama, 2015, p.30).

One aspect that public participation encourages is a two-way type of communication. In this way, the RLCs are active and are able to give feedback to the radio station on issues they discuss. However, does the radio station use that feedback from RLCs? Who sets the agenda for who? Is the participation valid? The agenda-setting theory is relevant here in order to assess how community radio and the RLCs influence each other's agendas and the results of such interaction.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 Methodology

This chapter focuses on the methods that this study used to collect data as well as analyse it to come up with findings.

4.1 The use of a case study

Yin (2009:18) defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within it's real life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident."

He states that this approach is used in a research where the questions ask how or why and requires an in depth description of a particular situation. He further describes the ability to use multiple tools of collecting data as one of the strengths of using a case study.

Since this research is qualitative and involves questions that need a deep evaluation of how community radio engages RLCs, it is necessary to use a case study. In addition, other than using multiple community radios, one case study is appropriate looking at the limited time frame that the study was conducted.

4.2 Qualitative Approach

This research used the qualitative study approach. According to Dawson (2002), "qualitative research explores attitudes, behaviour and experiences through such methods as interviews or focus groups." For this study, it is important to dig deep into the methods of audience participation through RLCs, the behaviours and dynamics shown in their participation as well as their experiences in the groups, as well as with community radio so far.

According to Miles et al (2014:28), the qualitative approach "attempts to capture data on the perceptions of local participants from the inside through a process of deep attentiveness, of empathetic understanding, and of suspending or bracketing preconceptions about the topics under discussion."

In an attempt to get deeper perspectives from the participants, qualitative research utilises fewer participants which ensures an in depth interaction with them and makes the process more personal.

4.3 Data Collection

Initially, the research was to use participant observation. I planned on going to Mchinji to take part in RLCs meetings in order to have a first-hand experience of how they conduct their meetings and what they discuss. However, due to Covid-19 restrictions, I was unable to go to Mchinji and opted to conduct interviews through phone calls.

According to Dawson (2002), semi-structured interviews are one of the common methods of collecting data in qualitative research as they are flexible.

> In this type of interview, the researcher wants to know specific information which can be compared and contrasted with information gained in other interviews. To do this, the same questions need to be asked in each interview. However, the researcher also wants the interview to remain flexible so that other important information can still arise. (Dawson 2002:28-29)

In order to encourage in depth discussions with the participants and add more questions as other issues arose, I used an interview guide and added more questions during the interviews. My research sub-questions were the basis of my interview questions that were open ended, to give freedom to the participants to express themselves. This is unlike in structured interviews where the researcher does not allow for participants to express themselves but make them choose from pre-determined answers (Krippendorff, 2004).

I interviewed Joseph Njanje, the station manager in order to get an overview of Mudzi Wathu community radio, the origins of RLCs, their goals and their relationship with the station. Afterwards, through a member of staff at Mudzi Wathu, I got contacts of RLCs based in Mchinji. I interviewed members of five RLCs, namely, Gomani (two women and three men), Mavwere (one man and two women), Kamphande (two women), Kabuthu (three women) and Kamuli (one man).

Since I wanted to interview three host/producers of programmes that the RLCs mostly engage with, the interviews with club members helped in identifying the three programmes namely, Katani Kambwiri, Ticheze Amayi and a special programme on Covid-19. In total, I interviewed 15 participants.

I first called all the participants in advance and booked to interview them at a time convenient to them. Since not everyone had a phone, I asked some of the members of RLCs to gather and put the phone on loudspeaker. I did this so that I could be able to reach out to other members who did not have personal mobile phones. The staff members' interviews were one on one as well as some members of the RLCs. Each interview ranged from 30 minutes to 1 hour and I recorded all the interviews with permission from the participants.

4.4 Data Analysis

According to Atkinson (2017:84) qualitative content analysis is there "to uncover any underlying meanings found in a text that cannot be found through the counting of themes or terms". Atkinson states that this can be done through reading of texts by the researcher and by the use of codes.

In this research, I assigned codes such as origins, characterististics, practices and achievements of each of the five RLCs that I interviewed. I took notes that helped in identifying emerging issues in the interviews. I was able to ask extra questions from the discussions other than those on my interview guide which allowed for other findings that the study did not foresee. After the interviews, I went back to the recordings and transcribed the data into transcripts for easy analysis.

I condensed the data by focusing on the content that answered the research questions and eliminating any irrelevant information. I then assembled the content to display the codes as assigned for each group using the interview transcripts.

4.5 Ethics Statement

This research followed the ethics requirements through the ethics committee at the University of the Witwatersrand. Permission was granted from the station manager at Mudzi Wathu community radio which is at a centre of this research. All participants (staff at the radio station and members of the radio listening clubs) were informed of their rights in being a part of this study. The participants were informed that participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. They were also assured of anonymity if they chose so. All of them gave consent to be a part of this study and agreed to be identified.

4.6 Limitations

In-person interaction cannot compare to phone interviews. Most of the participants are used to having in-person interviews and were reluctant to speak to someone they were not seeing. However, during the course of the interviews, they were able to open up and give out the relevant information. Covid-19 has limited the methods in this research, as the initial planned methods had to change. Nevertheless, this study has produced relevant findings that answers the questions that this research has asked.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 FINDINGS

This chapter addresses the findings from the interviews with community radio staff and members of RLCs at Mudzi Wathu that were conducted to answer the questions this study posed.

5.1 Origins of RLCs at Mudzi Wathu

According to Joseph Njanje (station manager), RLCs at Mudzi Wathu started in 2006, before the radio was fully established. This was after considering the challenges in health, education, and agriculture which people were facing in Mchinji district. However, poverty was the biggest challenge. The above-mentioned problems necessitated the opening of Mudzi Wathu radio station.

Since the radio was not operational, the discussions of RLCs were aired on the state's broadcaster MBC Radio 1. This stopped when Mudzi Wathu radio was established in the same year, 2006.

At first, the radio station conducted road show campaigns where they informed the community about the new radio station and its frequency. After that, a number of RLCs were established. However, most of the clubs were established through Mmudzi Mwathu (our village) project. Its objective was to establish RLCs and record programmes that were aired on MBC.

> It was a project called Mmudzi mwathu; they were focusing on Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) programmes. CRECCOM was still running the station considering that they could not just hand it over to inexperienced individuals. It was in the year 2016 when they handed it over to group village heads of Mchinji district. The village heads play a big role in monitoring radio operations. These village heads do not work directly with the radio station but rather, there is a board which was formulated by the chiefs. It is comprised of members from each traditional authority (TA). In total, there are nine board members from nine TAs because during that time there were nine traditional authorities. (Personal communication with Station Manager, Joseph Njanje, March 18, 2021).

The main objective of these clubs is to access information concerning challenges that people from rural areas face and to create a platform for social interaction. Currently, the radio has 17 active groups. Other groups are not active because the radio rarely keeps up with them due to a lack of resources (according to the station manager).

Each group has a chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary and vice, treasurer and group members. The radio encourages gender equality in these groups. However, some groups are composed of women only through a programme called Ticheze Amayi (literal translation "Let's talk, ladies"). This programme has its own groups aside from the "standard" groups. Most of the original groups were established through the radio station, but these women established their groups themselves.

Njanje added that the responsibilities of selecting group leaders' lies with the group members because they know each other better, and it is easy for them to determine the capability of prospective leaders. These groups can listen to a variety of programmes, for example, programmes on agriculture, health and education and it is up to them to choose what to listen to. The clubs set their own meeting dates and time. When they meet, some listen to the programmes as a group, and they are at liberty to discuss and ask each other questions based on the content on the programme they were listening to. Some questions and comments are forwarded to Mudzi Wathu radio through monthly reports. They include comments and recommendations. Using those recommendations, the station works on improving the programmes going forward. Overall, they play a role in helping to improve programmes.

Furthermore, each group has its own guidelines, and these are given to the radio station which acts as a regulatory body. These clubs are not only limited to listening to the radio, they are also involved in a number of outreach activities. They encourage girl child education in their respective communities by paying school fees for needy students. On agriculture, some clubs have a farm that is owned by the group; the yields from these farms enable them to reach out to needy families.

According to Njanje, for someone to join these RLCs, they have to go through the leadership and declare their interest. Before being accepted, the person is taken through the guiding principles of the group. At first, the maximum number of participants per club was twenty: ten males and ten females, including the youth. Currently, the number of participants in certain clubs can exceed twenty.

In most cases, when the clubs have special activities, they invite the radio station personnel to be present at those functions. The station records some programmes based on these club activities.

Sometimes the members of staff of the radio station join the sessions when invited. In some instances, when the clubs have misunderstandings on issues, for example, disagreements on who the leader should be, the radio personnel intervene as third party and help them to reach a consensus.

> Firstly, when they meet, they listen to radio programmes, and then they discuss the content. Then they discuss other agenda outside the programme. They also come up with action items from the discussions, which are then reviewed in their next meeting. Discussion points are emanated from the radio programmes. For example, on agriculture, they can discuss about controlling pesticides in reference to the content of the programmes they have listened to. On the other hand, they can also discuss educational issues such as challenges that girls are facing in the rural areas. (Personal communication with Njanje, March 18, 2021)

Njanje added that the radio station receives news content on health, education and agricultural sectors from the clubs. There was an issue where farmers in different areas were complaining that extension farm workers were not visiting the communities, and the station managed to engage

agriculture officials. After discussing with the agriculture officials, it was highlighted that extension farm workers had transportation problems hence not being able to visit all farmers in good time to help with their problems. This is also applicable to other sectors like health.

According to the station manager, these clubs also work together. When a particular club is facing some challenges, it can ask for assistance from another club and sometimes they conduct exchange visits. For example, last year there were inter-district exchange visits, where RLCs from Nkhotakota district visited Mchinji RLCs. This interaction promotes sharing of ideas among the clubs. These visits are organised by the RLCs themselves.

Nanje added that, in the past, these RLCs had recorders, which were donated by donors. These recorders were used to record group discussions, and they were sent to the radio station. The radio staff were using these recordings to come up with programmes. Currently, this is not happening because of lack of resources (they do not have the recorders anymore). The radio station only helped them with radio sets.

The radio station personnel do not take part during club discussions; they rely on the reports and feedback that the clubs send after their discussions. These reports are in the form of meeting minutes, which comprise the attendance register and discussion points.

The radio station has many programmes, some are donor funded and others non-donor funded. However, there are a number of programmes which seem to be favourites among the clubs.

> We have a radio programme called Katani Kambwiri. The name is Senga (indigenous language), and normally they discuss agricultural content. We also have a malaria control programme, funded by CRECCOM, in this programme, they discuss Malaria prevention issues. There is also Tiyende programme, which is also a favourite to radio listening groups. This programme focuses on early child development. Ticheze Amayi is another programme listened by most women clubs. We have "what is HIV & AIDS?" programme, which is also a favourite because it promotes charity work in the community. People living with HIV & AIDS in support groups also listen to this programme. Mentioned are some of the radio programmes, which are the RLCs favourites. (Personal communication with Njanje, March 18, 2021)

The radio also takes into account emerging issues in their programming. For example, they have multiple programmes focusing on Covid-19. These programmes educate the community on Covid-19 preventive measures and how to go about their usual businesses during the pandemic since most of them are farmers and small-scale business owners.

As earlier stated, I interviewed members from five RLCs of Gomani, Kamphande, Kabuthu, Kamuli and Mavwere. This was to find out how each club operates, what they discuss and what activities they are involved in. I found out that each of these clubs has its own focus and guidelines on how their group works. In this section, I will outline how each club operates, what programmes they listen to, topics discussed and their activities and contribution to the community.

5.2 Gomani Radio Listening Club

This section discusses the origins, characteristics and dynamics of Gomani listening club. It is based on the interview with five members of the club.

The club started in 2006 when Mudzi Wathu radio station was launched in Mchinji. The programme that this club listens to the most is "Katani kambwiri". This programme focuses on farming.

> We learnt about Gamphani Farming (Conservative Farming) through this programme. We benefitted from this type of farming as we can harvest a lot of crops on a small piece of land, unlike in the past, plus we do not use hoes once we have planted the seeds hence no heavy work. For those who have never heard about this farming, we start by digging holes where we plant our seeds, for instance, you can plant four maize seeds in one hole and after covering the holes; we cover the top with maize stalks so that grass does not grow, hence no need for weeding. (Personal communication with Rudos Kongoma, member, March 20, 2021)

The club has 25 members. 10 male and 15 female. Jalome Tsumba, the chairperson of Gomani RLC attributes this to men not being interested in group initiatives while women are in the forefront trying to develop themselves, their households and their community.

According to Louisa Mzungu (member), the purpose of the club is to develop their lives and community by listening to the radio programmes and discussing issues that affect their community.

The club meets once a week on Thursdays, at 3 o'clock for an hour at a place called Rediyo (radio). They have a battery-powered radio set given by the radio station. For one to join, they have rules they must follow. These are; being present at all club meetings; being punctual and participating in all club proceedings. The club members' ages range from 16 to 80.

> When we meet we start by listening to the radio programme, then we discuss on how we can improve our farming so that we have high yields. Sometimes when there is power outage at the radio station (radio goes off air), we just convene and discuss other issues that we are facing concerning farming. We choose our topics of discussion based on what we have heard on the radio on that particular day. For instance, stalk borer attacked our maize fields this season. When they had broadcasted on ways of protecting our maize from stalk borer, we discussed as a group on how best we can protect our maize from the stalk borer, hence our topic of discussion being derived from the broadcast of that day. We have a committee in our group that works hand in hand with group village head Gomani, so they are the ones who choose what we can discuss on that day (when radio is off air or when they discuss issues outside the broadcast), and then we send reports of what we have discussed to Mudzi Wathu Station. (Personal communication with Godfrey Chamoto, member, March 20, 2021)

There are 10 people in the committee holding different positions, thus the chairperson and vice, secretary and vice, treasurers, advisors and the village headman. Mudzi Wathu asked them to choose a committee and the members chose the people they saw fit for the positions. The committee has remained the same since inception because the club members feel the leaders are competent. The advisor mostly advises the club on personal well-being/character and is responsible for making sure that all members conduct themselves in an orderly manner.

According to club members, Ireen Chatsamila and Jalome Tsumba, the chairperson is the one who leads the discussion with help from the secretary. Everyone in the club is active. The members ask questions after listening to the radio, and the leaders make sure that everyone answers a question or makes a comment during the discussions. When the members convene, the secretary reads out the topics of discussion for the day, and then the secretary assigns each topic to a certain member to start the discussion. At first, some members were shy but now everyone is active and can speak publicly. Through the farming programme the club listens to, the members now have enough food as they harvest high yields through modern methods of farming such as the Gamphani farming practice. The community has also benefitted from the club because sometimes, when the group village head has rallies, the club is invited to share some of the things and discuss with the community. Sometimes the club goes to other villages to share their knowledge.

The radio station visits the club but not often as the station manager attributed it to lack of funds to enable these visits to the community. However, Gomani RLC says that there are instances where they are invited to the radio station to take part in discussions. They gave an example where the issue of 50-50 campaign (an initiative to promote women representation in leadership positions) was discussed, promoting women/girls to take positions in different sectors. The club proudly adds that they voted for a female counsellor as a result of this awareness.

According to Godfrey Chamoto (member), sometimes the club is invited to participate in a programmes on air. He gives an instance where the club was asked if their communities benefitted from community development fund (CDF). Mostly the club is asked to present their grievances in the communities. For instance, at Gomani, they had a clinic that needed some renovation, and through the pressure that the club in collaboration with group village headman Gomani pressed on the Member of Parliament (MP), the community was given some materials to renovate the clinic. Although renovations are still in progress, the club is glad that to have helped their community. The club also facilitated the building of a school, it is not yet finished as only two classroom blocks were built, but the club is still calling for contributions as the are building the school using community contributions.

In addition, Chamoto says, in the past, the community used to receive coupons (to buy cheap fertiliser) but only few people were getting them, so as a club they discovered that there was corruption taking place, that is when they approached the authorities and suggested that each club should have its own list of beneficiaries and that is how it is working now.

Gomani RLC boasts about the many achievements they have attained. From having a group farm to inspecting each other's individual farms. They also visit other RLCs in the community and share ideas with them. The club was also featured on Zodiak Broadcasting Station (ZBS), a well-known private media house. They were covered on a programme called "Ulimi ndi Business" (farming is a business) where they talked about how they have turned farming into a business as Mudzi Wathu recommended to them.

5.3 Kamuli Radio Listening Club

This section discusses the origins, characteristics and dynamics of Kamuli listening club. It is based on the interview with the Chairperson of the club.

Kamuli derives its name from Kapiri Mudzi Wathu Listening club, Kamuli in short. The club started in 2012. It started from a programme called Moni (greetings) where people called in and wrote letters to greet each other. Some members decided it was best to know each other in person hence the birth of the group.

The club has worked with many NGOs on hygiene, development and human rights, malaria, nutrition and reproductive health. They have 26 members (12 females and 14 males). Members' ages range from 20 to 50, and they listen to multiple programmes on Mudzi Wathu.

Every person interested in joining the club has to pay a membership fee of K1000 for women and K1500 for men, which is used during times of need, such as events like weddings, funerals and sickness.

> As a way of increasing women membership, we have taken off their membership fee, and now women join the club at no fee. It has been three years since we removed the fee for women. This difference came to aid women to be able to join our club. Most women face many challenges to raise money, so we did not want them to fail to join the club because they cannot afford the membership fee. For men, we believe that they can be able to find the money and pay. Therefore, the difference is there to increase and encourage women membership. (Personal communication with Geoffrey Chiyesa, Senior Group Village Headman and chairperson of Kamuli, March 26, 2021)

Unlike the other clubs I had interviewed, Kamuli RLC meets twice a month at the beginning and at the end. This is to accommodate other schedules for members because some of them belong to more than one committee, which also need their time. However, this is just for administrative meetings but for activity meetings, community awareness campaigns for example; they meet at least twice a week. The monthly meetings are the most crucial ones because it is during these meetings that they also listen to the radio. During the meetings, the club divides into teams of two-three people to go out into the community with a specific message and when conducting the next meeting, they bring reports from the activities carried.

According to Chipesa, he as a Chairperson calls for a meeting through the Secretary. If the Secretary is engaged, he does the communication myself, which is mostly done through phone

calls. At the meetings, the Chairperson gives welcome remarks and introduces the agenda for the day. The Chairperson further shares the main points of discussion on that particular day and asks everyone to be free and participate in the discussions. If the agenda for that particular meeting is just an announcement or a notice going to the members, the members comment where necessary. When it comes to planning, all the club members come together and set days, time, venue and message for that particular week or month. The club also has an action plan, which guides them whenever the club is working on a project.

Chipesa added that, during the meetings, which can take up to two hours, the members identify the main points to include in their messages to the community. They then coach each other on how best to deliver the message and look at possible questions which may come from the community members during the awareness campaign. On questions which they cannot handle, the members go in the company of an expert in that field.

The club boasts about increased knowledge on various issues as they also attend training events organised by the NGOs they work with. The club is invited to speak on issues in the community. The club also acts as a tool to mobilise people on development activities.

In addition, the club has helped in holding people accountable for their actions. For instance, a veterinary officer certified meat that came from unhealthy livestock. The club worked hand in hand with butchery owners and investigated the matter. The veterinary officer was transferred after the investigations revealed that he was indeed involved in the malpractice. All this resulted from engagement and investigative skills gained through the RLC.

> Public expenditure tracking, for example, through the Area Development Committees (ADCs) and Village Development Committees (VDCs), is also another area where the community has benefitted a lot from the work of the RLC. People have to know how various development initiatives have been implemented and where these committees (ADC & VDC) become suspicious; the community always comes to us to assist in tracking. We do this through the *"*Mphamvu ku Wanthu" (Power to the People) initiative, where the citizens engage relevant authorities on how public funds are used. Therefore, if we talk about benefits, which have come through the RLC, we have so many of them. (Personal communication with Geoffrey Chiyesa, March 20, 2021)

5.4 Kamphande Radio Listening Club

This section discusses the origins, characteristics and dynamics of Kamphande listening club. It is based on the interview with two members of the club.

The club started in 2006. They meet once a week, at 2 p.m. on Fridays. The club has 17 members and requires a membership fee of K200 for one to be a member. Members' ages range from 20 and above. It is an all-female club, although this was not the case at the beginning. This is attributed to male members not showing up for meetings according to the club chairperson.

Like the other clubs, Kamphande RLC is involved in charity activities such as helping the elderly, the sick and needy children in their community. They usually discuss issues that they listen to in the radio programmes.

> We discuss all the issues addressed in the programme and encourage each other to follow whatever we have discussed. Some of the issues we discuss, for instance, are how to follow the Covid-19 preventive guidelines put in place by the government. In the community, there are some people, who are not following the social distancing and washing hands with soap guidelines, so we discuss on how best we can inform these people on how to follow these rules. We also discuss on how we can follow these guidelines at home and ensure that our children are following them. I am the one who leads these discussions with the help of Tionenji Chiema (her vice). We have a secretary, a treasurer and discipline masters. (Personal communication with Rose Lidiyamu, chairperson, March 19, 2021)

The club is part of the Ticheze Amayi groups (self-established female-only clubs). A notable achievement emerged from Kamphande RLC's self-funded trip to Nkhotakota, another district that also has a community radio; they went to interact with other groups from there. During the trip, the club members learnt about rice, soy and poultry farming which they have adopted in their community. The money earned from the farming business is what the club uses in their outreach activities.

> We have benefited a lot from this station in different ways, we never had knowledge on many issues, but through the station, we now have knowledge on how to handle them. We have learnt about preventive measures of the Covid-19. We have learnt on how to take care of our homes health wise, we have learnt issues to do with farming and they have helped us as women to come together and practice village banking, which we started in 2012. We are able to buy fertiliser in our homes; we are able to buy some basic needs like salt and soap; whenever one is sick, we help each other so that the person goes to the hospital to receive medical attention. (Personal communication with Clausta Chilemba, member, March 19, 2021)

5.5 Mavwere Radio Listening Club

This section discusses the origins, characteristics and dynamics of Mavwere listening club. It is based on the interview with three members of the club.

This is the biggest club among the five RLCs. The club has 74 members (20 men, 54 women). They meet twice a week on Tuesday and Thursday from 2pm to 4pm. The purpose of the group is to help each other in irrigation farming. The club does not require a membership fee, unlike the other groups (this could explain the high number of members).

> As a chairperson, I have many responsibilities. I schedule group meetings and ensure that all members are informed about the meetings. I usually ask young people in my area to extend the meeting invitations to members in their respective homes. When we plan to talk

> about fieldwork, we meet in any one of our fields, and when we plan to talk about forestry, we meet in the forest. After we listen to a radio programme, we discuss the farming lessons that were covered in the broadcast and how we can apply them in our fields. I, the chairperson, lead all the group discussions. I give the members a chance to ask questions and make comments during discussions. (Personal communication with Josephine Kwazizira, chairperson, March 18, 2021)

The club has planted trees on up to 10 acres of land. This has helped preserve the environment. The club members have also benefitted from farming lessons, as they are able to earn money from yields (the club owns a group farm where they grow onions, cabbage and maize) which they use to send children to school and meet some household needs.

Mavwere RLC members save some proceeds from their harvests, and some are shared among the club members. Everyone is free to use the money they receive to meet their personal needs. After members harvest the crops, Mudzi Wathu helps them to find markets for their yields on a programme called Titsatse Malonda (Let us sell).

> We have had opportunities to take part in radio programmes such as sharing remarks in farming radio programmes. Mudzi Wathu radio sends representatives to record program content from our club members to be used for radio programmes. For example, we invited Mudzi Wathu to our tree planting exercise. They were interested in how we plant and take care of the trees, and they broadcasted it in a programme. (Personal communication with Mary Banda, member, March 18, 2021)

The club also acts as a village bank. This is a common initiative in Malawi, where members contribute money according to what they can afford. These contributions are daily, weekly or monthly. The more money you contribute, the more interests you get at the end of the year. Members are also able to access loans during the year from these village banks to support their businesses.

5.6 Kabuthu Radio Listening Club

This section discusses the origins, characteristics and dynamics of Kabuthu listening club. It is based on the interview with three members of the club.

This is another Ticheze Amayi group launched in 2014, and was established by the women themselves. There are 23 members in the club, ranging from 23-53 years of age. The club meets on Wednesdays at 2pm. The club's topics of discussion include gender based violence, cooking, business and maternal health.

The club has a chairperson and vice, secretary and vice, one treasurer and an advisor. Once elected to the position, one holds it for three years; after that, if the committee members did well, they are re-elected. If the committee members make mistakes, the club can remove them from the positions even before finishing their term.

> At the meetings, we start with a prayer, and if the meeting is at 2pm, you have to be there before that time; late comers pay a fee of K100. We encourage each other to have small businesses so that we should not only rely on men. We also encourage pregnant women to go to the hospital to receive antenatal services and to deliver at the hospital. We also encourage women to send their daughters to school because teaching the girl child is like teaching the whole nation. Sometimes we collect funds which we use to buy different items to give to patients at the hospital. We give items such as soap and sugar to our friends if they are admitted at the hospital. We also give a chitenje (cloth), baby clothes to pregnant women and newborn babies at the hospital. (Personal communication with Agness Aliyoni, chairperson, March 19, 2021)

According to the members, at first, the women used to call into the Ticheze Amayi programme, but nowadays "the ambassador" (this is what they call the producer) visits and records their discussion, which is later broadcasted on the radio station. This was done because the women could not afford to travel to the radio station to record the programme there, and for some women, they do not have airtime to call into the programme.

The women also go to the radio station on the 31st of December to be on air. They discuss what they learnt and the challenges faced throughout the year. They also do exchange visits with other districts to learn from other groups.

As for the benefits of being part of the group, Mrs Kambandira (member) had this to say:

> I want to add that, if there ever was an ignorant person, it was I, Mrs Kambandira. Our ambassador (the producer) would be a witness. I only listened in the meetings and "the ambassador" pointed me out saying "the woman wearing a Doek, you look busy, can you say something?" I would always say no, but these days, I know everything, and I learnt how to speak in public, and how to socialize with people; I have also learnt the importance of being in a group; people need to have a friend they love, who they look at the way they look at themselves.

The club managed to advocate for a night school in the area. The club informed the radio station, the headteacher of the school as well as the village Chief. All these parties sat down and discussed the issue. They were told to wait, and after about a year, everything was in place to start a night school and secure another school block so that girls who dropped out of school because they fell pregnant, could go back to complete their secondary education.

During the interviews, three programmes stood out, and I interviewed the hosts/producers of these programmes to know more about these programmes and their benefits to the community through these RLCs.

5.7 Ticheze Amayi (Let's talk, ladies)

Firstly, the programme is hosted/produced by Emmanuel Zandonda (the ambassador) and airs three times a week from 8am-8:55am on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and mostly broadcast live, but sometimes the host goes to the communities to interact with women in their various clubs.

> Generally, these are women who are doing something in their life which we believe can have an impact on others who listen to the programme. We look at various issues such as reproductive health, home-based violence and encouraging women to be self-reliant by doing small-scale businesses or owning a piece of land. The programme also seeks to help in strengthening the bond between wife and husband. In this programme, we also make an emphasis that a woman has a major role to play in ensuring that children are well-nourished. Through the same programme, we also provide a platform where women teach each other different cooking skills whereby we feature one or two women with knowledge in a certain technique such as food preservation. This is done either through a live phone-in programme where women share the skills or by bringing such women into the studios. This helps someone to acquire such skills through the programme. Ticheze Amayi mainly aims at giving women a chance to interact and share skills and knowledge. (Personal communication with Emmanuel Zandonda, host/producer, March 26, 2021)

According to Zandonda, the programme gives the women a chance to send a topic of their choice, which they would like to discuss. This happens through a direct phone call or text message to the producer of the programme. Therefore, the women are free to send a topic of their preference and this is featured in the programme. The programme is also open to other groups outside the "official" groups, such as religious and village bank groups.

Zandonda said that Ticheze Amayi has about 12 groups in Dowa, Kasungu, Mchinji and Lilongwe. When the programme started, women used to greet and encourage each other in various areas through the phone-in segment. Later, women from Kapiri and Mavwere, through the same programme, suggested that they should meet and know each other personally. This gave birth to clubs in which women encourage one another on different issues such as reproductive health, economic empowerment and many others. The first groups of these women (29 in total) started meeting in April 2014.

For now, these clubs have not been provided with resources like radios and recorders because most of the members in these clubs also belong to other RLCs established by the radio station, which have radio sets. Therefore, most of the times, the clubs use these radio sets to listen to the programme. Recently, these women were invited to a workshop where they were trained on how they can use mobile phones to save money and improve their economic status. This workshop involved leaders from these clubs who were trained in small-scale economic activities and how the mobile phones can be used to boost their finances.

According to Zandonda, the clubs were invited to a meeting which was held in Mchinji, and the women came from various communities within the district including those from areas in Lilongwe

but located close to Mchinji district. The workshop aimed at teaching women the modern ways of saving money especially using mobile phones.

According to the club members, the Ticheze Amayi clubs are completely different from the other radio listening clubs because the issues the women talk about are not the same issues that men would be comfortable to talk about. In their clubs, women are able to open up and help one another in different areas; on the other hand, it is very rare for men to be part of these associations. For example, in a group of ten members, there could only be two or three men and the rest would be women. Therefore, these women groups are also helping in convincing men that associations are important. For instance, the agriculture sector and many others are encouraging farmers to be in groups and use modern farming technologies. These women are the ones facilitating the formation of groups in their communities.

In addition, women have been empowered to take an active role in addressing issues that affect them and their communities. In the past, women were considered passive in various development initiatives in their communities. For example, now they are able to access reproductive health services because they have realized that it is their right.

According to the club members, the group has provided the women with a platform where they can freely discuss issues, which affect their health, which would otherwise be difficult at other public places such as at a hospital. When the women meet in their clubs, they are able to share experiences on various issues. For example, through the sharing of experiences, some women managed to convince their husbands, who used to resist the use of the contraceptives. Some men restrict their wives to associate with others, while some do not allow them to do business or engage in any economic activity. Through this programme, women are now able to open up about these issues.

> Men also listen to the Ticheze Amayi programme. I receive calls even from local leaders and chiefs testifying on a certain edition, and how it has affected their lives and yet in the programme I was talking to women. This means that men are benefiting a lot from what women discuss in the programme and are able to question some of their acts, for example, acts of gender-based violence. Some couples have even changed the way they used to do things such as household budgets where husband and wife are now able to work together in finding a market for their produce and how they are going to use the returns from the sales. This is so because in the programme, we sometimes feature an expert who explains how best the husband and wife can work together in their families and this has helped in changing many households. (Personal communication with Emmanuel Zandonda, March 26, 2021).

According to Zandonda, these women arrange trips to visit fellow women in other areas. For instance, women from Nsundwe, in Lilongwe, had an event where they were sharing items such as mattresses, they invited other Ticheze Amayi groups to go, but they did not reveal the main activity in their invitation. The host was one of those who were invited. When the women arrived

in Nsundwe, they were surprised to see their colleagues sharing the items. It turned out to be a "learning and sharing" event, and this encouraged the other groups such that in the following year, the other groups from other areas such as Bua did the same and shared some items. In the process of these visits, the women have managed to build strong working partnerships/relationships among themselves. The radio programme has helped to build and enhance relationships among various individuals and groups of people. An individual from Lilongwe who listens and follows the programme can decide to go to Mchinji or Kasungu, and that person will find it easy to relate with others there since the programme has created strong bonds between people from different parts of the country.

On why the women call the host/producer "ambassador", Zandonda says the name came about because in the programme, he acts as a mediator between men and women to bring unity. Children also know him by this name such that when one goes to Mudzi Wathu community radio and ask for "the ambassador", he is easily found. He also says the title fits him well because whenever he is on air, he does not take sides in his approach of issues.

5.8 Katani Kambwiri

The name of the programme, Katani Kambwiri is a Senga (indigenous language) name, which means, "Hold a hoe" and is hosted and produced by Francis Zulu. It started when the radio station consulted the community to choose the programme to be covered on air, and the communities chose an agricultural programme. As a matter of fact, the main reason for establishing the radio in Mchinji was that the communities around Mchinji district should be food secure. Therefore, there was a need for this radio programme to give modern agricultural practices and different improved agricultural technologies, including how the people in the communities can take care of their livestock. The programme works hand in hand with the district agriculture office.

According to Zulu, this programme airs every Tuesday and every Thursday from one o'clock to half-past one in the afternoon. The audience had the opportunity to choose when the programme should air, and the communities suggested one o'clock in the afternoon because most of them are busy with farm work in the morning. Around one o'clock they are usually home, so they have time to listen to the radio.

The programme bases its topics on the agricultural calendar. The producers look at what kind of topics to discuss so that farmers have relevant information in line with the calendar. For example, during the sowing season, the programme covers crop management, and in the harvesting period, it covers issues to do with storage.

> We also have some unplanned topics, especially when there are some emerging issues like the fall of armyworms, and livestock diseases. We interview experts in such fields and produce a programme to air to the farmers in order to help them in dealing with such problems. (Personal communication with Francis Zulu, host/producer, March 24, 2021).

According to Zulu, listening clubs are like entry points when they go to the communities. When new technologies come in, the community radio first engage the listening clubs because they are already in the communities, and whatever information the clubs get, they can easily disseminate it to other people that are not part of the listening clubs. If club members notice an agricultural problem in their community, they link up with the radio. When the radio station gets the information, they go to the agricultural office to explain to them that there is such a scenario in such a community and see what they are going to do.

For instance, when the issue of fall armyworms emerged, the community asked if the radio station could ask the agricultural office if they have information so the communities know how to deal with the situation. The agricultural office gave remedies on what people could do and information on what pesticides farmers could use through the programme.

Zulu added that the clubs are involved in a lot more activities than just listening to the radio, which calls for a name change to suit the club work. There have been suggestions to call them radio action groups, as they are not passive (like the name RLC implies), the clubs are very active in community activities.

5.9 Covid-19 special programme

According to Andy Rico Harare (host) the programme which was called "Tidziwe za Covid-19" (let us know about Covid-19), started in January 2020. The programme aired between 4pm to 5pm. During the programme, they hosted personnel from Mchinji district hospital. These were doctors in different specialties. The programme aimed at creating awareness on Covid-19: how it spread and how to prevent it.

The radio station contributed airtime while the hospital provided the information. The programme has ended but the radio station still tackles Covid-19 in other programmes. It ran for a year (January to December). Every Tuesday, personnel from the hospital brought topics to be discussed. The host asked questions of "public interest", and the listeners themselves were able to ask questions when phone lines opened (not always). The hospital personnel still go to the radio station when there are emerging issues. For instance, the issue of covid-19 vaccines, has been met with many conspiracy theories. The programme was able to air a segment focused on vaccines to debunk the conspiracy theories and share the necessary information on the vaccines with the community.

> As a radio station, we saw the need to introduce a programme to inform people about Covid-19, so for people to get credible information, we had to have people from the hospital to help us disseminate the information. We approached the director of health services, who provided us with the expertise. They provided us with different personnel according to the topic of discussion for the day. For instance, if the topic is about the kind of food a Covid-19 patient is supposed to eat; it means a doctor from the Nutrition department was the one coming. (Personal communication with Andy Rico Harare, host/producer, March 24, 2021)

Harare added that the opening of phone lines for the audience depended on how much time the discussions took. Sometimes, 30 minutes was for panel discussion and the other 30 minutes was open for phone lines. However, there are no records of how many people were able to call in.

On the impact of the groups on the radio and the community, Harare had this to say:

> When organisations come, they ask about our listenership, so these groups are part of our audience and we are proud to mention them. Besides working with the radio, these organisations also meet with these clubs to know if the programmes are really reaching them. On the side of the clubs, the impact is there too because these clubs are benefiting a lot since the coming of Mudzi Wathu radio. For example, we have this club from Kapiri called Kamuli; this club has done many things through the programmes that Mudzi Wathu provide. As I earlier said, we work with FHI360, which has a subdivision called Health Communication for All (HC4L); with this organisation people from Kapiri now know how to observe hygiene after using the toilet. In addition, the community was not receiving adequate attention at Kapiri mission hospital. In collaboration with the clubs, we were able to meet with those in charge of the hospital and tried to enlighten them on what was happening, and I am happy to say that now people receive adequate attention. Furthermore, the clubs have managed to bring multiple developments in their community. (Personal communication with Andy Rico Harare, host/producer, March 24, 2021).

CHAPTER SIX

6.0 Analysis of findings

This chapter analyses the key findings derived from the overview of the interviews done with the staff of Mudzi Wathu community radio and members of RLCs as laid out in the previous chapter in line with the theoretical framework that this study is using.

6.1 A public within a public

A number of scholars (Mhagama 2015; Cowling and Hamilton; 2010) have described community radio as a form of alternative media that caters for marginalized groups of people in society. In the Habermasian sense, the media provide an open platform where people are able to discuss issues and criticise those in power. While others regard the media itself as a public sphere, some have said the media is just "an organ" of the public sphere as there are other platforms away from the media that these discussions also take place (Cowling and Hamilton, 2010). This means that the media is a medium, which gives a space for public deliberations to take place. However, these deliberations are not restricted to the media and this is true for RLCs as they form a space outside the community radio where public deliberations occur. In this way, they have become "an organ" for such discussions in the community.

Members of the community, some who know each other and some, who are strangers, meet under Mudzi Wathu radio and form groups where they not only listen to radio programmes but also discuss issues that affect their communities. Although rare, these clubs are also able to go on air and get involved in public debate. In other instances, RLC activities are recorded (at the moment, most of the clubs do not have working recorders) and the content is added into some programmes and in the process, communities are able to learn from each other through the radio.

Mudzi Wathu community radio itself is a public, outside the broader public of mainstream media. This public is there to cater for a specific group, which is usually marginalised. The community radio further branches out into RLCs in various communities who listen to their programmes, comment on the issues featured, and discuss the content in the broadcast. In the process, the community radio has become a link between these clubs and those in power as the radio station helps in bringing the communities' grievances to light.

Apart from the RLCs established by Mudzi Wathu, other groups have emerged, on their own, without being established by the community radio itself. These are the Ticheze Amayi clubs, which came to existence through a programme by the same name on Mudzi Wathu radio. These women approached the radio and told them of their plan to create these groups strictly for women.

Women are one of the marginalised groups in media (O'Brien, 2019). Community radio may attempt to cater for them by providing programmes focused on them, such as Ticheze Amayi.

However, not all women are able to participate in live broadcasts, whether in the studio or in the phone-in segments, as not everyone has mobile phones nor the airtime to make a call.

With these groups, the women can gather and discuss issues on a personal level and in a comfortable setting. From the discussions with the women, they can be open to each other and build friendships with each other. These women are confident to talk about any issues without fear, which is not the same with mixed-gender clubs. The women have also built connections with other women in districts other than Mchinji in which Mudzi Wathu community radio is located.

The Ticheze Amayi programme has connected the women in the community, some of who are strangers. This brings Warner's idea of a public into being, Warner suggests that strangers are able to become a public through the circulation of text, which is in this case, the Ticheze Amayi programme. The women discuss a variety of issues such as hygiene, cooking skills, farming practices and provide each other with loans for their businesses through village banks.

In general, RLCs have involved outreach activities such as helping the needy, the girl child and their communities as a whole by holding those in power accountable for their actions. The clubs have dealt with corruption and lobbied for transparency on development projects in the area. The clubs are also involved in creating awareness in their communities on different issues, thereby reaching out to others in the community who are not club members.

Some of the clubs have gone further to be more inclusive of women, by removing the membership fee required to join as men usually control the finances in the rural households making it hard for women to afford such fees.

In general, RLCs have become a space within the community radio public, which has brought together ordinary people. This has helped them express themselves on issues in the community. If community radio is an alternative media, as other studies have suggested, then it is safe to describe RLCs as a public within a public and the women-only RLCs as counter publics to the other RLCs according to Fraser's stand on publics.

6.2 Setting the agenda for discussions

The agenda-setting hypothesis states that the media tell their audiences what to think about by highlighting certain issues over others. However, Severin and Tankard (2014) note that this process is not automatic and varies from individual to individual.

The basic procedure in RLCs is that they listen to programmes on the radio and discuss the content of the broadcast in the clubs. Community radios such as Mudzi Wathu go a mile further and provide radio sets to these clubs to ensure they are able to access the programmes since not everyone can afford the radio.

From the findings, I noted that the content of the programmes the clubs listen to the most forms a part of what they discuss. In this case, Mudzi Wathu does set the agenda for most of their

discussions. The topics in the programmes are of what media personnel say is of "public interest". However, what they describe as public interest may not always be a reality for these communities.

Although the staff say the listeners can call in or text in ideas for discussion, such as the case with the Ticheze Amayi programme, not everyone has access to mobile phones, making it true for only a specific group of people with access to such gadgets.

On the other hand, the RLCs also have set agendas for their discussions. Apart from getting content from the broadcast, the clubs have also identified their own agendas for discussion from their communities. Some of them include renovating a clinic and a school, holding accountable corrupt officials and making sure there is transparency in community projects.

They have also brought up grievances to the radio station, such as the outbreak of armyworms that were destroying their crops. Since they could not deal with it on their own, they had to get expert assistance through the Katani Kambwiri programme, which focuses on agriculture.

The clubs have also taken it upon themselves to invite the community radio to their events or activities where they get recorded and the content broadcast on air. One of the clubs, Kamuli featured on a programme where they talked about how they have turned farming into a business on one of the well-known national media houses, ZBS. In this way, they have reached out to more people than those who listen to the community radio.

The committees in the clubs also play a role in choosing the topics to be discussed. As Kamuli RLC said, the radio sometimes goes off air when there is an electricity outage, as they do not have backup power. In that case, they forfeit the listening aspect. The clubs refer to their action plan, where they have activities lined up for a specific period according to what is happening in their communities.

6.3 Conclusion

The main question of this research was to what extent do RLCs promote the participation of communities in community radio? In answering this question, this research finds that RLCs promote community participation by bringing people together to discuss issues that affect their communities. This results in the people having the power to share knowledge and being able to engage authorities on various issues such as corruption, accountability and transparency in development projects. This serves an important function of community radio, which is empowerment, giving power to the people who are often powerless on other platforms. The community radio itself serves as a catalyst to this community participation by establishing some of the RLCs and including the community input in its programming.

The research sub questions asked whether RLCs encourage active listenership and what types of public they create. In addition, I sought to find out the goals and structures of RLCs. I also explored how they hold their discussions and what topics they usually discuss.

The study found that each RLC has different goals, and this depends on what the group agrees on in the beginning. Some clubs have a focus on agriculture, where they share practices which they can use to get better yields and ensure food security. Other clubs have gone further to have group farms from which they share the proceeds among the members. Outreach activities are also common among the clubs as they help needy people in the community. The clubs have also taken on the watchdog role, where they ensure that there is transparency in development projects by following up on a number of issues such as how funds are utilised in projects. They also make sure that everyone in the community benefits from such projects.

The clubs usually have a committee comprising of a chairperson, secretary, treasurer and advisors that lead the clubs in their activities. The clubs have the responsibility of selecting people for these positions. They also decide independently on how long these people can stay in these positions according to their performance.

With Mudzi Wathu rarely visiting the clubs due to the lack of resources that enable such visits, the club activities are independent. The broadcast content feeds into the discussions, but the clubs also come up with their own agenda with the help of their committees. Some of the clubs have come up with action plans for their activities in the community, which include advocacy, awareness campaigns, philanthropy, agricultural co-operatives and ensuring transparency and accountability in development projects in the community.

Apart from being included in these clubs and activities, the women themselves have created their own clubs based on the Ticheze Amayi programme on Mudzi Wathu radio. In these clubs, the women are able to talk about issues they would not otherwise talk about in the presence of men. The women have also built friendships within and outside the community, and other women have gained confidence in the process, as they are able to express themselves freely.

Women have also been able to hold positions even in the mixed-gender groups. For instance, out of the five clubs I interviewed, women were in the chairperson positions in three of the clubs. A woman also leads the largest club, Mavwere, which has 74 members. According to the club members, having women in leardership positions in the clubs has also influenced the community where they elected a female counsellor after discussions on the 50-50 campaign, which encourages the community to consider selecting women in leadership positions.

According to Fombad and Jiyane (2016), rural women have the potential to be key players in developing their communities, but challenges such as illiteracy, poverty and lack of access to information prevent them from utilizing their potential.

> Listeners' clubs should serve as a platform where women have the opportunity to express themselves and unpack issues and topics they wish to discuss. These clubs should create opportunities for women to speak to other women. They should focus on imparting information relating to the lives of women such as: HIV/ AIDS, family law, disabilities of women, agriculture, gender inequality, education, social problems, inequality, education,

> social problems, violence against women, micro finance, reproductive health and early childhood development (Akhter, 2011; Al-hassan et al., 2011 cited in Fombad and Jiyane, 2016, p.54).

For Mudzi Wathu RLCs, they have succeeded in involving women in their communities and they are able to talk about the above-mentioned issues, which has helped in developing their households as well as their communities.

According to Cowling and Hamilton (2010), social inequality excludes people from participating in the formal forums such as the ones in mainstream media. In RLCs, the forum is open to all. Most of the members are farmers and small-scale business owners; hence no one is considered elite. Since most of them are in the same social class, no one rules over the other. Although some members were not as active in the beginning, they testified of how they have changed with time and are now involved in all the group activities.

As Mwale (2006, p.95) states, "public debate can lead to public opinion formation, and sometimes, to decision- and policy-making." This is true for this research, as it has outlined the changes that came from the RLCs discussions. For instance, the clubs managed to oust corrupt practices in their community, asked for better health care and accountability in the development projects implemented in the community. With the discussions on the 50-50 campaign, they were able to change their mindsets and elected a female counsellor in the community. All this is a contribution of the ongoing discussions that these clubs have in their community.

The actions that have derived from these group discussions concur with Mwale's findings where he says that participation has to be accompanied by action in order for it to be meaningful. This research has identified a number of actions done through the RLCs, which shows how much power they have as a public and counter publics (in the case of the women clubs).

The study finds that RLCs do more than just "listen." The listening aspect is a small part of their activities, and they are more involved in projects to develop their communities. This concurs with Manda (2015) who suggested giving them a different name to encompass all the activities they are involved in.

The community radio has become a "mediator" between the community and those in power. The clubs use the radio as a platform where they can air out their grievances and get access to the appropriate authorities who they otherwise would not be able to reach to in normal circumstances.

Although their presence on-air is minimal, RLCs have become platforms where ordinary people in rural areas have a chance to have their voices heard, build relationships, help each other in income-generating activities, help the needy, and ensure accountability and transparency in community development projects in their area. This is a move from the one-way street development approach where decisions were imposed on the community. The new two-way approach integrates the community's voices in all the processes, thereby leading to participation

in development activities in communities. In this way, RLCs have become an important tool in fostering development through communication.

Appendix

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR RLCS

Name of interviewer:

Date:

- What are the stated goals of radio listening clubs?
- How many members are there in your club?
- What is the criteria for membership
- What is the age range of members?
- How is the gender distribution
- How often are the meetings?
- For how long do you meet?
- What do you talk about?
- How are the topics selected for discussion?
- How relevant are these topics to your daily life?
- Who facilitates the discussion?
- Who speaks more?
- What guidelines are there in discussions?
- What has been the impact of these discussions on the community?
- How involved is the community radio in the discussions?
- How involved are the RLCs in radio content and programming?
- Describe the type of space RLCs create for members

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR MUDZI WATHU STAFF

- How did RLCs start at Mudziwathu?
- How are they structured?
- What are the objectives of these clubs?
- What guidelines are they supposed to follow?
- What are the activities of RLCs?
- Who participates in these activities and how are they invited?
- How involved is the community radio in the activities
- How are discussions conducted in RLCs?
- How are the topics selected?
- What programmes do they listen to the most?
- What are these programmes about?
- How are RLCs involved in these programmes?
- What has been the impact of engaging with RLCs?
- What type of space do RLCs create for the community?

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