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The Advent and Growth of Television Broadcasting in Nigeria: Its Political and Educational Overtones

by Charles C. Umeh*

Abstract

The history of television broadcasting in Nigeria revolves around the suitability of the medium for political propaganda and for educational broadcasting. This article examines political and educational motivation for the establishment of television in Nigeria from 1959 when the Western Nigeria Television (WNTV) was established to early 1962 when the Federal Government and the three existing regional governments each had a television station of its own. The creation of new states was accompanied by the proliferation of television stations until the establishment of the Nigerian Television Authority (N.T.A.) checked this proliferation and wastage of resources. The article assesses the performance of educational television broadcasting in Nigeria and concludes that it has largely been successful.

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Avènement et croissance de la télévision au Nigéria: contenus politiques et éducationnels

Résumé

L'histoire de la télévision au Nigéria tourne autour de son utilisation comme moyen de propagande politique et pour l'éducation. Cet article étudie les motivations politiques et éducationnelles qui ont poussé à la création de la télévision au Nigéria dès 1959 avec la Western Nigeria Television (WNTV) au début des années 1962 lorsque le Gouvernement fédéral et les trois Gouvernements des régions d'alors avaient chacun sa propre station de télévision.

La création de nouveaux états a vu la prolifération de stations de télévision avant que la NTA (Nigerian Television Authority) ne mette fin à cette tendance et au gaspillage de ressources qui lui était inhérent.

L'article évalue les résultats de l'enseignement télévisuel au Nigéria et conclut que dans une large mesure, ses résultats sont un succès.

Introduction

The Early Years of Television in Nigeria

Television development in Nigeria has been motivated by two factors: politics and education. The two are inextricably linked since education is always a vote catcher, and all governments are, to a degree, genuinely altruistic vis-a-vis education. It follows then that it is the educational factor that the leaders present to the people in order to secure their approval and support for the introduction or expansion of television. That television could, once established, be used for blatant propaganda must have motivated politicians, although the extent to which this is so can only be surmised. Tracing the history of the establishment of the first television station in Nigeria, Egbon (1982) writes that

Television transmission began in Western Nigeria on October 31, 1959. This service which was initiated by a Regional Government was not only the first in Nigeria, but remains today the oldest in the whole of the African continent. The birth could be termed purely accidental, because it was borne out of political dissension. . . . Chief Obafemi Awolowo and his partymen had walked out of Parliament in protest against a constitutional debate at the eve of Nigeria's independence. This action was condemned by the ruling government over the Federal all-Nigeria Radio Broadcasting Service, but access was denied the opposition leader to reply to the accusations. Instead of establishing a Radio Station alone, to offer an unrepressed 'voice' in national affairs, the Western Region commenced television transmission. Thus while the aims of this expensive venture as delineated by the Government may not seriously be in dispute, yet the real motives may actually be more of 'regional pride' and 'prestige'. Perhaps the whole action was calculated to spite political opponents (p. 5-7).

Doubtlessly, the people of Western Nigeria, at the time, had to be shown why Western Region had to embark upon what was described (by critics) as a 'wasteful' and 'prestigious' project. According to Faronbi (1979, p. ii) ' . . . Ibadan Television was established as a missionary in a wilderness of unbelievers and critics. To many, it was a diversion of the scarce resources of the region to a prestigious project'.

This kind of thinking at the time was strongly countered by the argument that television was being established to satisfy the educational aspirations of the people of the Western Region. The *Daily Times* (November 2, 1959) carried a front page report of the inauguration of the new Western Nigerian Television service in Ibadan. Chief Awolowo said in his speech that the venture was initiated because the Regional Government was convinced that it could play a major role in increasing both the pace and standard of education which was regarded as the key to progress in other fields. He said that it was the aim of his government to bring information about development in Nigeria and in the outside world

into the people's homes so that they might benefit from that knowledge. He declared that 'television will serve as teacher and entertainer, and as a stimulus to us all to transform Nigeria into a modern and prosperous nation'. This educational task might be performed through formal educational programmes for schools and less formal programmes for adults. Political motivation notwithstanding, the Western Nigeria Television venture took off successfully and became the pride of the entire Region and the nation.

The other two regional governments in the east and the north soon followed suit. The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (N.C.N.C.) government of the Eastern Region and the Northern People's Congress (N.P.C.) government of the Northern Region had to prove to their respective peoples that whatever the Action Group (A.G.) government of the West could do, they too could do for the people of their regions. Even the Federal Government at Lagos had to hurry into the television race. So, three additional television stations sprang up in Nigeria in a quick succession, Adegbokun (1983 :3) writes that with its establishment on the 31st of October, 1959, WNTV became the first operational television station on the continent of Africa, with the slogan 'First in Africa'. A year later, the former Eastern Nigeria Television Service (ENTV) came into being. This was followed by Radio Television Kaduna, established by the former Northern Nigerian Government as an arm of the Broadcasting Company of Northern Nigeria (BCNN) in March, 1962. The Federal Government, a month later, established the Nigerian Television Service (NTS) in Lagos. Thus, the Federal Government and the three existing regional governments of the early 1960s all had television stations of their own.

Observers at the time believed that although these television stations were welcome and useful in many respects, they nevertheless served partisan political purposes for their various governments. This political and sectionalistic heritage was to be passed over to future television establishments in Nigeria. Egbon (1982) voiced what was in the minds of many Nigerians:

Although all the Nigerian Regional Television Stations in the First Republic (post-independence period) proclaimed national goals in their operational statements, yet the dominant tone was very much sectional and essentially partisan in federal politics. The accent was on regionalism and strengthening the power base accordingly to the needs of the government in power. In short, programming was simply divisive and propagandistic, as the coverage traced a sectional pattern-reflective of the nation's political ideologies and diversities (p. 7).

After this initial scramble for regional television stations, a period of over one decade elapsed before another major scramble erupted.

The Proliferation of Television Stations in Nigeria

The 1966 military take-over of government in Nigeria brought remarkable changes in the political, social and economic structure of the country. The army ruled for 13 years (1966-1979) during which the nation witnessed remarkable events such as the Nigerian civil war, the sudden explosion in oil revenue (the 'oil boom'), the changing of the Nigerian constitution and the splitting of the country into 12 states in 1967, and later to 19 states in 1975. The creation of the new states caused a new wave of sectional consciousness, referred to as 'statism'. Every state wanted its own facilities, a university, a polytechnic, a college of education, a teaching hospital, its own radio and television stations, and so on. The oil wealth which the nation enjoyed at the time eliminated the fear of financial constraints for most of these hastily conjectured and planned development ventures.

Adebokun (1983, p. 3) holds the view that the creation of states did, indeed, bring about the establishment of state-owned television stations but that another factor, stronger than statism *per se*, was the effectiveness and importance of television broadcasting as demonstrated by the older stations.

Bendel State took the lead in this new wave of television acquisition by state governments. The Bendel State Television Service was established in 1973. Again educational television (ETV) services were one of its prominently advertized concerns. Other state government television stations were established in quick succession. Adebokun (1983) reports that 'among the stations that sprang up during the military regime were NTV Benin (now NTA Benin), Nigerian Television Jos, Nigerian Television Kano, Nigeria Television Port Harcourt, Nigeria Television Sokoto' (p. 3).

Eventually the military government, spurred on by the need to have co-ordinated nationwide coverage of the All-Africa Games in 1973, established the National Television Authority in 1976. This restricted the growth of television for three years.

The 13 year-long army rule in Nigeria terminated in 1979 with the adoption of a presidential system of government and the installation of an elected civilian government. The keen party competition during the electioneering campaign made it possible for each of the five competing political parties to become victorious in some states out of the 19 of the Federation. During the election campaigns, each of the political parties promised all manner of social amenities and development projects to the electorate and, after the elections, each of the five political parties set about fulfilling many of these promises without any consultation or co-ordinated planning with the Federal government at the centre. The four-year term of

the civilian administration which followed was, therefore, highly disorganized as far as the initiation of development ventures was concerned. The five political parties were in open competition in order to show what they were able to achieve for the states they controlled. State government-owned universities, polytechnics, colleges, hospitals, schools, radio and television stations sprang up everywhere with little rational planning. They were able to do this because they revoked the charter of the NTA. Commenting on the magnitude of the proliferation of television stations in Nigeria, Adiche (1984) noted that the 34 TV stations in Nigeria had proliferated over 25 years at a rate of 1.5 stations per year — a rate which outstripped general economic growth. 'People in television industry in Nigeria say the country has the fourth largest television network in the world. One of them, Mike Enahoro, managing director of Prime Television and a one-time newscaster on NTA, says Nigeria has been moved forward and is only second to the United States in numbers' (p. 5). This final claim, although not accurate, demonstrates the prestige and status which television had been endowed with.

One remarkable feature of the rapid growth in the number of television stations in Nigeria is the corresponding rapid growth in the number of both trained and untrained manpower for the industry. The Federal and State governments recruited a large number of indigenous television staff and many of these were sent to the United Kingdom, United States and other developed countries for professional television training. The resultant rapid increase in the number of trained television personnel in the country helped to bring about a remarkable increase in the number of locally made television programmes. Reviewing the performances of the television industry in 1983, the Director General of the Nigerian Television Authority was reported as saying that '. . . from 90 per cent imported programmes between 1959 and 1962, the figure had dropped to 20 per cent. With a staff strength of 4,000 in 1979 we grew to 10,000 in 1983' (Adiche 1984, p. 5).

The Establishment of the Nigerian Television Authority (N.T.A.)

The establishment of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) was the first attempt by the Federal Government of Nigeria to have a centrally financed and co-ordinated television industry. Born out of an experiment in joint broadcasting in Nigeria, the authority played a major role in further development of the industry.

In order to provide effective and co-ordinated coverage of the second All-Africa Games hosted by Nigeria in 1973, all the broadcasting agencies in the country were pooled together to form the Broadcasting

Organization of Nigeria (BON). So, instead of flooding the sporting arena with hundreds of radio and television crew from the numerous radio and television stations in the country, the new organization co-ordinated all the broadcasting activities and fed all the media units from that central pool. This experiment was so unifying and successful that the military government, a few years later, decided to unite all the various television stations in the country under one body — the Nigerian Television Authority. A decree (No. 24 of 1977) was promulgated (effective from April, 1976) establishing the Nigerian Television Authority. Adegbokun (1983) summarized the powers of the NTA under the decree thus:

The decree gave the Authority the exclusive right for television broadcasting in Nigeria. It stated further that 'it shall be the duty of the Authority to provide, as a public service in the interest of Nigeria, independent and impartial television broadcasting for general reception within Nigeria'. The Authority shall ensure that the service which it provides, when considered as a whole, reflects the unity of Nigeria as a Federation and, at the same time, gave adequate expression to the culture, characteristics and affairs of each Zone or other parts of the Federation (p. 3).

The N.T.A. took over the ten television stations that existed in the country and embarked on a policy of equitable geographical spread of television stations throughout the country. As the ten stations that already existed were sited in ten state capitals, the N.T.A. decided to set up nine additional television stations in the capitals of the remaining nine states of the Federation. A station was also established at the new Federal Capital, Abuja.

The N.T.A. Zones

In order to ensure effective management of all the television stations, the N.T.A. decree created six operational zones: Zone 'A' comprised N.T.A. Ibadan, N.T.A. Ikeja and N.T.A. Abeokuta; Zone 'B' N.T.A. Benin, N.T.A. Akure, N.T.A. Aba-Owerri and N.T.A. Port Harcourt; Zone 'C' N.T.A. Enugu, N.T.A. Calabar and N.T.A. Makurdi; Zone 'D' N.T.A. Kaduna, N.T.A. Kano and N.T.A. Jos; Zone 'E' N.T.A. Maiduguri, N.T.A. Yola and N.T.A. Bauchi; and Zone 'F' N.T.A. Sokoto, N.T.A. Minna and N.T.A. Ilorin.

Each of the six zones is headed by a managing director. The three remaining stations, N.T.A. Lagos, N.T.A. Channel 10, Lagos, and N.T.A. Abuja, being sited in the old and the new Federal capitals (Lagos and Abuja, respectively) were to function together as the National Television Production Centre, also headed by a managing director. The entire N.T.A. organization made up of 22 stations is headed by a director general at the Headquarters, Lagos (Adegbokun 1983, p. 5).

Functions of the N.T.A.

The N.T.A. provided a far more organized approach to television expansion and utilization in Nigeria because its functions were carefully mapped out by the decree. These functions are:

- (a) to erect, maintain and operate television transmitting and receiving stations;
- (b) ensure the establishment and maintenance of standards and promote the efficient operation of the entire system in accordance with national policy;
- (c) establish and operate a formula for sharing funds among stations;
- (d) act as liaison between Federal Government and the zonal operations;
- (e) plan and co-ordinate the activities of the entire television network;
- (f) establish such number of production centres as it may consider necessary from time to time;
- (g) specify the type of programmes which should be transmitted by the whole network and the quantity, type and contents of foreign materials;
- (h) enter into arrangements with any person or any authority for the purpose of obtaining concessions, licences, privileges and other rights;
 - (i) manufacture, produce, purchase, or otherwise acquire films, gramophone, and other mechanical records and materials and apparatus for use in connection with the broadcasting services;
 - (j) provide other persons with, and receive from them, matters to be broadcast;
- (k) organize, provide and subsidize for the purpose of broadcasting, educational activities and public entertainment;
- (l) collect in any part of the world and in a manner that may be thought fit both news and information and to subscribe to news agencies;
- (m) acquire copyright;
- (n) acquire public printed matter that may be conducive to advancing skills of persons employed in the broadcasting services, or the efficiency of the equipment used in the broadcasting services or the manner in which that equipment is operated, including the providing of the Authority or the others on its behalf of facilities for training, education and research.

The N.T.A. has made significant achievements since its establishment in 1977. Its one-time Director General, Dr. Ofonagoro (1984) spoke of some of these achievements while opening the West African Regional Conference of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association.

We in Nigeria have accumulated some experience of television broadcasting reaching back to 1959, when the Western Regional Government of Nigeria established the first

television service in Africa In recent years, we have engaged in an ambitious transmitter development programme which laces the entire system into one single national grid, with a network of transmitters, microwave links and satellite transmission facilities, all aimed at achieving a 100 per cent coverage of the entire territory and people of Nigeria in the very very foreseeable future (sic) (p. 21).

When the civilian administration took over from the army in 1979, an amendment was introduced to the N.T.A. decree (renamed 'the N.T.A. Act'). The 1979 Constitution gave the Nigerian president the power to allow state governments, organizations and individuals to operate television stations, hence reverting to the previous situation. The immediate outcome was predictable; many state governments rushed into establishing their own state-owned television stations to compete side by side with the 22 N.T.A. stations. By the end of 1983, nine additional television stations had been established by Ogun, Oyo, Anambra, Ondo, Bendel, Imo, Lagos, Plateau and Kano states.

One advantage to the television industry, and to the nation as a whole, of the two bouts of speedy proliferation of television stations was the rapid increase in the use of the television medium by Nigerians. Many individuals, establishments and homes procured television sets as a result of the oil wealth of the last two decades. Adiche (1974) reported a survey which showed that ' . . . about 87 per cent of the people surveyed viewed more than two hours of television programmes a day in all states'. In addition, the number of channels which became available to some Nigerian viewers increased from one or two during the early 1960s to five or more channels in some locations in the country by the 1980s. Muniru (1984) commented on the increased choice of television channels for Nigerian viewers. He affirmed that television had spread to all areas of the country. Growth had been phenomenal. Viewers between Western State and Lagos could select from some twelve channels.

When, in 1984, the army again came into power in Nigeria, they immediately directed their attention to correcting some of the politically motivated developmental disparities of the civilian administration. Proliferation of television stations in Nigeria became one of the many such areas of attention. The military government, in 1984, announced a plan to rationalize the number of radio and television stations in the country.

Paradoxically, the availability of numerous radio and television stations in Nigeria during the 1979-83 civilian administration should have enhanced national unity but instead it produced widespread disharmony caused by the unprecedented misuse of these two media facilities by politicians and their agents. While inaugurating the Committee for the Rationalisation of Radio and Television Services, the then Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters, lamented the abuse of the radio and television

media by the politicians during the civilian regime. *New Nigerian* (October 24, 1984) reported the Chief of Staff's remarks:

The exercise was aimed at streamlining television broadcasting in the country, saving cost and making the services more efficient. He condemned the role played by the various radio and television stations during the civilian regime. He said that the stations without exception became megaphones of political parties in power, suppressing or grossly distorting information to serve the whims and caprices of politicians. By so doing, Brigadier Idiagbon added, 'they fanned the embers of disunity, disaffection and discord'. They also succeeded in poisoning the political atmosphere to such an extent that law and order virtually broke down in many states of the Federation.

It was expected that radio and television broadcasting and development in Nigeria would be given a new sense of direction as a result of the findings and recommendations of the Rationalization Committee. However, we hasten to say that political considerations again helped to frustrate the efforts of government to effectively prune down the number of radio and television stations in the country.

Educational Television Broadcasting in Nigeria

Educational television through broadcasting to schools dates back to 1959 when the television was first introduced in Nigeria. As has been said earlier, the prospects for using television to enhance formal and informal education was uppermost in the minds of the founding fathers of the country's television industry. *Fatorama*, a publication of the N.T.V. Ibadan (1979) reported a policy statement on educational television broadcasting made at the commencement of television broadcasting in Nigeria.

Ibadan, November 3, 1959 — . . . W.N.T.V., A Joint Commercial venture of the Western Nigeria Government and Overseas Rediffusion Limited, will devote a major portion of its time to specially produced educational programmes aimed at schools, hospitals, and community centres for which the Western Government is providing 1,000 free sets.

When the Eastern Region established its television station (E.N.T.V.) in 1960, the educational television broadcasts were also directed to the people of the Region. The same pattern was followed when the Northern Region's N.N.T.V. was established in 1962 and, even when the Federal Government established its own television, educational television broadcasts were aimed only at the people around Lagos. There was, however, a financial factor in that the local transmitters could produce signals, at the time, which were able to cover only the local territory and its

environs. Whatever the case, the development of educational television during these early years of television in Nigeria can best be considered along regional lines.

It can be argued that the regional development of television was an offshoot of the prevailing regionalization of policy making in Nigeria at the time, of which education was also a part. 'Education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education within each region, while the Federal ministry has charge of schools in the Federal District and some institutions of higher learning in the region' states UNESCO (1967: 113). Educational television broadcasts were the joint responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the television station of each region which would broadcast them. The broadcasts were based on the syllabi of schools of the region concerned. Hence, the question of a national educational television policy for all schools throughout the country was not feasible at this time. Instead, the various regional governments formulated their own educational television policies. In 1965, UNESCO carried out a study of three out of the four regional educational television programmes existing in Nigeria at the time. The aims of these three programmes studied were given as follows:

- I. Western Region programme began in 1959. Its purpose is to reduce teaching deficiencies and to enrich the content in selected secondary (second-level) syllabus courses, and to provide examples of good teaching. Some presentations are also made for teacher training college students.
- II. Northern Region programme began in 1962. Its purpose has been primary, secondary and teacher-training college levels. Some direct teaching of primary grades is now provided.
teaching of primary grades is now provide.
- III. Lagos (Federal District programme began in 1965. Its purpose is to alleviate problems stemming from the shortage of adequately trained teachers by providing direct teaching at the primary level; and to expand the content of primary curricula (UNESCO, 1967, p. 113).

The Eastern Region programme which began in 1960 also aimed at the enrichment of the content of secondary school courses and made enrichment broadcasts for primary schools.

The former Midwestern Region (now called Bendel State) was the last of the four regional governments in Nigeria to introduce educational television for schools in its area of authority. Before the establishment of the educational television broadcasting unit in 1973, the Bendel State Government set up what was called the 'UNDP/UNESCO Mission on Educational Television in Midwestern State, Nigeria' to plan the effective take-off of the programme. The BTV Unit was aimed at:

... the provision of planned instruction at primary, secondary grammar schools, teacher training colleges as well as for adult education and nursery schools. The identified priorities for educational television programmes in the schools include supplementing classroom teaching in the subject areas of Integrated Science, Mathematics, English Language, African History and Current Affairs. (Okpue 1980, p. 31).

UNDP/UNESCO not only played an advisory role but went ahead to assist the government in carrying out the feasibility study and preparation of a detailed development plan; it helped to set up a pilot project and provided experts and equipment for the evaluation of the programme.

The Nigerian government, television stations, the ministries of education and schools throughout Nigeria enthusiastically welcomed the introduction of educational television into Nigerian schools and expected that television would revolutionize education in Nigeria. Educational television engendered very high hopes and expectations from all quarters but few bothered to learn that the new medium demanded certain operational conditions from its users before efficiency and effectiveness could be achieved.

A host of problems plagued the various educational television programmes. Some of these problems were peculiar to the medium while others were specific to developing countries. Moss (1983) wrote that:

Just as such expectations in the developed world were foiled by resistance to change and inherent technical and psychological obstacles, the promise of educational television for the Third World appears not to have been matched by its performance. Does this prove that the initial plans were misguided in either case? Not necessarily. Expensive and relatively disappointing though these developments have been, they were not clearly so costly as some other projects from 20 years ago, and what has been learned from them can now be applied confidently at a time when technical advances and educational needs are shifting in favour of the application of television to the solution of many more educational problems (p. 53).

Numerous attempts have been made in the past to identify major obstacles to successful educational television broadcasting to schools in Nigeria. It is widely believed that many of the ETV projects failed because they were hurriedly embarked upon by politicians who advertized the educational potentialities of television in order to gain support for the television project. Lack of adequate planning is, therefore, one of the greatest obstacles to successful educational television broadcasting for schools in Nigeria.

However, it is not true that television has not made some contribution to formal and informal education in Nigeria. On the contrary, television has registered some significant achievements. Educational television broadcasting to schools still goes on inspite of operational

problems. The National Educational Technology Centre (NETC) still produces educational television broadcasts for schools. These good quality educational/instructional programmes are broadcast daily to schools and colleges all over the country through the N.T.A. network service.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study affirms that the advent and growth of television broadcasting in Nigeria were motivated and channeled, respectively, by strong political and educational considerations. Some of the problems and shortcomings of the medium have been highlighted and examined. These problems and shortcomings notwithstanding, television broadcasting in Nigeria has been a success in comparison with its performance elsewhere in the Third World.

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