

Airwaves Scorecard

**Report of the Broadcast Media Coverage of the
Political Transition Programme.**



June 1999

**... promoting and protecting press freedom and freedom
of expression in Nigeria.**

Airwaves Scorecard

**Report of the Broadcast Media Coverage of the Political
Transition Programme.**

June 1999



© Media Rights Agenda
ISSN 1119-7110

PREFACE

This report of its broadcast media coverage of the political programme, the final in the series, was conducted by **Media Rights Agenda** (MRA), a non governmental organisation established for the purpose of promoting and protecting press freedom and freedom of expression in Nigeria. Media Rights Agenda is a member of Transition Monitoring Group (TMG).

The aims are to examine the extent of fairness exhibited by the broadcast media in giving each political party free, equal and uninhibited access to air their views regardless of the role such party or individual might have played in previous dispensations.

This is especially important because of the invaluable role the media can play in helping to enthrone and sustain functional democracy, mostly by giving the electorate opportunities to appropriately familiarise themselves with the political process, actors and issues.

This enables citizens make informed choices whenever they enter a polling booth to perform their civic duty.

It examines also how the Government acts to ensure free media access to political news sources and protect the media from harassment.

This report focuses on the coverage of the political programme by three television and two radio stations during the month of May 1999. Due to unforeseen circumstances beyond our control, the report for the fourth television stations monitored along for previous reports under this exercise could not be obtained for publication.

Being the last in the series, the discussion with respect to the basis of the monitoring exercise, freedom of election and the electoral process, all of which were first published in the maiden publication under this project have been reproduced. Abridged versions were being published in subsequent reports.

Also, the legal boundaries of election reporting in Nigeria as well as a background discussion on the broadcast stations monitored for this exercise which was first published in the February report in the series has been reproduced in this report.

The variables which formed the basis of monitoring and analysis in the April and May 1999 reports under the series have been retained in this report, while a reproduction of the earlier variables and justifications is also hereby reproduced in this report.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This report was written by **Josephine Izuagie**, Co-ordinator of the Broadcast Monitoring Project, and **Osaro Odemwingie**, Publications Officer for MRA. **Bunmi Oke** provided secretarial services for the project. The project was supervised by **Edetaen Ojo** MRA's Executive Director.

Media Rights Agenda is grateful to the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in Washington D.C. for providing the financial support for the monitoring project and the publication of the report.

Media Rights Agenda is also grateful for the technical assistance it received from ARTICLE 19, the International Centre Against Censorship, in London, which supplied copies of its publication: "Election Reporting - A Practical Guide to Media Monitoring" to the project personnel; the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) in Washington, D.C., which also provided copies of the "NDI Handbook - How Domestic Organisations Monitor Elections: An A to Z Guide", and the Carter Centre of Emory University in Atlanta for providing MRA with copies of its book "Television and Election".

Content

Preface.....	i
Acknowledgement.....	ii
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
a. Basis of Monitoring Exercise.....	1
b. Freedom of Expression and the Electoral Process.....	3
c. Legal Boundaries of Election Reporting in Nigeria.....	5
- Broadcast Media.....	5
d. Objectives of Exercise.....	8
2. GENERAL CONSIDERATION.....	9
a. Government.....	9
b. The Broadcast Media.....	9
3. ASSESSING THE GOVERNMENT.....	10
4. ASSESSING THE BROADCAST MEDIA.....	13
a. Limitation.....	13
b. Variables.....	15
i. Reports on Accusations of Fraud.....	15
ii. Reports on Accountability in Governance.....	15
iii. Reports on Loyal Opposition.....	15
iv. Reports on Post-Election Democratic Development.....	16
v. Others.....	16
5. ABOUT THE BROADCAST STATIONS MONITORED.....	16
6. PRESENTATION OF RESULT.....	21
i. Radio Nigeria, Abuja.....	22
ii. Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Abuja.....	24
iii. Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Kaduna.....	25
iv. Ray Power Radio, Lagos.....	26
v. MiNAJ System Television, Obosi.....	26
7. ANALYSIS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	28
a. Analysis.....	28
b. Conclusion.....	31
c. Recommendations.....	33

1 INTRODUCTION

This is the sixth and final report of the Broadcast Media Monitoring Project of Media Rights Agenda (MRA), a member of the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) which is a coalition of human rights non-governmental and civil society organisations formed in August 1998, for the purpose of developing integrity in the electoral process by monitoring and reporting on the prosecution of the political transition programme. This report is based on the monitoring of selected broadcast media to assess their coverage of political issues during the period between May 1 and May 31, 1999.

This report focuses on the coverage of political programmes by three television and two radio stations.

The Television stations are:

1. The Federal Government-owned Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), in Abuja.
2. The Federal Government-owned Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), in Kaduna.
3. Privately-owned MiNAJ Systems Television in Obosi, Anambra State.

The radio stations are:

1. The Federal Government-owned Radio Nigeria in Abuja
2. Privately-owned Ray Power 100.5 F.M in Lagos.

(a) BASIS OF MONITORING EXERCISE

The legal basis for fair and effective coverage of electoral processes lies in a variety of regional and international human rights instruments, particularly those provisions which protect the rights of people to freely choose their leaders and to receive information. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of a government: This will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures¹

In a nutshell, this simply is Representative Democracy. This is more popularly defined as the government of the people, for the people and by the people, which was coined by a former American President, Abraham Lincoln.

Other international instruments mirror and elaborate upon these rights. The African Charter on Human and People's Rights, for example, states that:

1. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 21(3)) The Declaration was adopted and proclaimed by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 217 A(III) of December 10, 1998*

Every citizen shall have the right to freely participate in the government of his country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives in accordance with the provisions of the law ²

On its part, the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Government (ARUSHA 1990), also acknowledges that:

.....popular participation is, in essence, the empowerment of the people to effectively involve themselves in creating the structures and designing policies and programmes that serve the interests of all as well as to effectively contribute to the development process and share equitably in the profits. ³

When citizens enter a polling booth to vote for the candidate of their choice, they are exercising one of their most fundamental rights. This right is guaranteed by a number of international human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

In order to exercise this right fully, citizens must be able to meet, speak with, and listen to representatives, candidates and colleagues about community issues. The rights to assemble and associate freely are also protected by these same international human rights instruments.

Individuals, as potential voters, must be particularly well-informed during an election. Not only do they require information about the various candidates - their qualifications, opinions, voting records, and characters - voters should also be familiar with the contending parties' platforms and policies. It stands to reason that in countries which do not have a long history of democratic elections, voters will need information about what the election is for and how to vote.

Gaining access to information during an election campaign is an extension of the right of citizens to be well-informed and hold and express opinions about their governments' activities generally. These rights to information and free expression are also guaranteed by international instruments. For instance, Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. ⁴

To this end, the African Charter for Popular Participation mandated the national and regional media to

*...make every effort to fight for and defend their freedom at all cost, and make special effort to champion the cause of popular participation and publicize activities and programmes thereof and generally provide access for the dissemination of information and education programme on popular participation.*⁵

2. *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Article 13) The Charter was adopted by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) on June 27, 1981 and entered into force in October 1986*
3. *African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation (ARUSHA 1990) (Article 11).*
4. *Ibid (Article 19)*
5. *Quoted in Popular Participation In Development : Training Manual (1998) Human Rights Committee Justice, Development & Peace Commission - Ijebu Ode, Ogun State*

Even in stable democracies, there may be limitations on these rights. But these are carefully conceived to protect democracy, not undermine it. Specifically, any restriction must be provided by law, relate to one of a small number of exceptions set out in the instrument guaranteeing the right and be necessary in a democratic society.

Indeed, in certain instances limitations on these rights have been approved to maintain public order, protect privacy or bar communications that would promote religious, racial or national hatred.

To strengthen the rights to freedom of expression and information at the local level, the rights have been laid out in various regional human rights agreements. For instance, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights sets forth the principle that:

*Every individual shall have the right to receive information, ... [and] to express and disseminate his opinions within the law.*⁶

The Inter-American Convention on Human Rights guarantees the rights of individuals to freedom of thought and expression. Similarly, the European Convention on Human Rights guarantees that:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of expression... [including] freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.*⁷

Indeed, the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria amply guarantees this right also. It says:

*Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and receive and impart ideas and information without interference.*⁸

It is upon this sturdy foundation that the right to be informed and to hold and impart opinions during an election campaign is built.

(b) FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

In order for a democracy to function, citizens must be able to make informed choices at the ballot box. To do this, they must have access to accurate and full information about the candidates, parties and issues. It is the duty of the government to ensure that an environment exists where facts, opinions and ideas can flow freely, where all sides of an argument can be heard and where debate is robust.

Government should also create an environment where the privately owned media can

6. *Op cit (Article 9)*

7. *European Convention on Human Rights (Article 10). The instrument, also known as the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, was signed by contracting states of the council of Europe on November 4, 1950. It entered into force on September 3, 1953*

8. *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, Section 39(1)*

express a wide variety of opinions about the issues, parties and candidates. At the same time state-owned or publicly funded media must remain unbiased when collecting and disseminating information about the election.

During an election campaign, there are three sectors of society whose rights to information and free expression must be specially protected - potential voters, the news media and the various political forces.

The point is, therefore, made that incontestable as those acknowledgements are, an essential part of any functioning democracy, is the mass media; pluralistic and unrestrained. What is implied is that, Functional Democracy is best enhanced when all contesting points of views are being fairly and equitably communicated so that the people may make informed choices.

Secondly, apart from providing a vehicle for widely expressing contrasting and conflicting views, the media helps to moderate such views and as well, present them with appropriate decorum for palatable consumption. So that what the electorate get is not the raw and rough, and sometimes unguarded, utterances of politicians and others involved in the political process, but considerably watered down, polished and non-combustile views.

Thirdly, the media also monitors elections. In addition to reporting on the various processes and final results, the media investigate allegations of abuse, conduct pre-election polls, and establish mechanisms for quickly projecting and announcing election results.

Fourthly, the mass media provides an avenue for the governed to hold the government accountable and then, if they wish, change it. Simply put, therefore, media scrutiny is indispensable in achieving genuine participatory democracy.⁹

Indeed, the prime place of Television and Radio as medium of political mobilisation is incontestable. While the television with its visual effect can create the most potent awareness and emotion, the radio is especially important in a country such as ours where illiteracy is high, where newspapers do not circulate out the towns and where television is not widely available because of poor electricity supplies and the high cost of television set.

Even in the poorest of countries, most rural families will have access to portable radios and have sufficient funds to buy batteries.

In his introduction to "Television and Elections", former US president, Jimmy Carter noted that television has become a principal source of news and information around the world. According to Mr. Carter, *"its rapid spread and unheard-of penetration is nothing short of phenomenal. In affecting the lives of people everywhere, and, more particularly,*

⁹ See Article 19: Election Reporting - A Practical Guide to Media Monitoring, (1998) pp 1-2

*in communicating messages in terms of changes and crisis, it can help to shape the most decisive events that move both citizens and their leaders.”*¹⁰

By this same fact, it goes without saying that any authority, be it the government or interest group, that can manipulate the mass media, will ultimately manipulate such an exercise as an election.

Nigeria is at this present time undergoing a political transition process which aims to usher in civilian democratic government after a decade and half of continuous military rule, and two failed attempts at transiting.

Determined this time to get it right emotions are decidedly high. At issue are:

Firstly, whether the military is sincerely disposed to go back to their barracks and face their constitutionally assigned role of territorial defence.

Secondly, whether the military has and does intend to foist its favoured candidate on the people.

Thirdly, the question is, anxious and suspicious as Nigerians are, is the press mature enough to be above board? Is it giving each political party free, equal and unhindered access to air their views, not minding the roles such parties / individuals might have played in previous dispensations?

Those, indeed, are the main focus of the Broadcast Media Monitoring Project of Media Right Agenda.

(c) LEGAL BOUNDARIES OF ELECTION REPORTING IN NIGERIA **Broadcast Media**

The domestic legislation and other provisions, which regulate the coverage of elections and politics, are directed principally at the broadcast media. This is, perhaps, understandable considering the widely held view that radio and television remain the most effective means of mass communication in Africa having regard to the high level of poverty and illiteracy.¹¹

The Political Parties (Registration and Activities) Decree No. 35 of 1998 gives radio and television the function of assisting members of the public in partaking of all ideas, ideals and experiences that help them live in a society that is humane and democratic. It requires that such radio and television programmes should influence members of the public to make living in society orderly and disciplined.

10.. See *Television and Election 1992* by Ellen Mickiewicz and Charles Firestore, the Aspec Institute and the Carter Centre, Maryland

11. See *Who Rules the Airwaves: Broadcasting in Africa (Article 19 and Index on Censorship London 1995) P.1*

Under the Decree, radio and television are also to assist and sensitize Nigerians in making the right political choices, which will help in bringing into being a good and accountable government.

Other functions of radio and television under the Decree include: to foster political awareness among the political parties in Nigeria; to enlighten the public on the provisions of the Nigerian Constitution; to promote public interest and consciousness in participatory politics; to educate Nigerians on their rights and political duties; and to encourage the evolution of broad political fronts based on national ideals and choices rather than on ethnic or other prejudices.

The Decree enjoins radio and television stations to provide a forum for competing ideas and ideals to be traded freely and publicly.

The National Broadcasting Code states the political objectives of broadcasting in Nigeria thus:

“Broadcasting shall contribute to the development of national unity and participatory democracy.

Therefore, the political objectives of Broadcasting shall be to:

- (i) create and promote political awareness amongst the people to achieve a democratic society;
- (ii) inculcate in the people the spirit of tolerance of all shades of opinion; and
- (iii) promote social justice based on the responsibilities and rights of the individual in society.”¹²

The second schedule to Decree No. 35 of 1998 contains guidelines on political campaigns through electronic media. The Decree also contains guidelines for programming and debates on radio and television.

The Decree requires radio and television stations to allot time equally to political parties and candidates to market themselves. It also stipulates that the rates for commercials charged political parties should be the same.

It states that political party broadcasts should not exceed one hour per week per station, at pre-election times, or 30 minutes per week at other times. The duration of party talk is also limited to about 10 minutes, and preferably not more than 15 minutes.

The Decree stipulates that the sale of airtime like jingles should not exceed 60 seconds and that no voice of a member of staff of the radio or television station is to be used in political jingles.

The National Broadcasting Code outlines “the minimum standard to be observed by all operators of radio and television stations” in Nigeria¹³. As part of these standards, it provides extensive guidelines for political coverage.¹⁴ Besides the broad parameters laid out in the preamble in this area, the guidelines also relate specifically to live coverage, news interviews and discussion programmes.

The Code contains a range of sanctions, which may be imposed on a station for any breach of

12 See p.9 Paragraph 1.4.5 of *The National Broadcasting Code, 2nd Edition (National Broadcasting Commission, 1996)*

13. *ibid* p. 3. paragraph 1.1.2

14. *ibid* p. 3. paragraph 1.1.2

the guidelines contained in it. These include the revocation of its license, if it commits a serious breach of either the technical or non-technical aspects of the Code; reprimand or warning; light or heavy fine; reduction of broadcast hours or suspension of license, depending on the gravity of the offence.

The Code requires all political programmes to observe the provisions of extant Acts, Decrees and electoral laws. All stations are obliged to adhere strictly to the rules given by the electoral body.

It also provides that political party broadcasts, which it describes as programmes over which content political parties exercise control, should be only those in which the parties seek to explain their views and policies.

All political broadcasts are required to be in “decent language” and to be clearly identified as political broadcasts which should not be presented in a manner that would mislead the audience to believe that the programme is of any other character.

The Code stipulates that equal opportunity and airtime should be provided to all political parties or views, with particular regard to the amount of time and belt.

It seeks to regulate the conduct of broadcast producers by stipulating that “while a broadcast producer may interact with politicians in the course of his duties, this interaction shall not be such as to lead to the belief that he is either a member or sympathizer of any political party”

It gives every station the responsibility to produce and report the activities in the political arena in news and programmes, and requires such production to be objective and fair. Panelists must also be of comparable status.

The objective of news and programmes, under the Code, shall be to promote public discussion of political issues.

For live coverage, the Code stipulates in Paragraph 4.5 generally that live coverage of public events should be fair and balanced. But specifically, it stipulates that: “The live coverage of public events, especially of demonstrations and disturbances, shall be fair and balanced and just enough for the enlightenment of the citizenry. It shall not sensationalise or glamorise the event or exploit broadcasting’s unique advantages to the detriment of national interest and security.”

With regard to news interviews, the Code requires that all such programmes should be guided by ethical standards of journalism and imposes on the station an obligation to state during the broadcast when a news interview excludes an important or newsworthy area of the issue under discussion.

Besides, the Code states, where an interview entails an agreement to submit questions in advance or to exclude an important or newsworthy area concerning the subject, or where further developments have taken place after the recording, this should be stated at the beginning of the broadcast.

For discussion programmes, panelists are required to reflect the various viewpoints and to be of comparable status.

The Code also imposes an obligation on the station to state at the beginning of the broadcast

where a discussion excludes any important or newsworthy area, or where further developments have taken place after the recording.

The Code also contains guidelines on the broadcast of political advertisements.¹⁵ It prohibits the commercialization of political news or coverage in the interest of fairness and balance and to prevent the monetization of political broadcasts.

It stipulates that no advertisement, including commercial news, shall be accepted in a political programme and requires the advertiser to be clearly identified in all advertisements.

The Code also stipulates that “no advertisement shall contain anything which amounts to subversion of constituted authority or compromises the unity, sovereignty and corporate existence of Nigeria as a secular state.”

(d) OBJECTIVES OF EXERCISE

The objectives remain as stated in the previous reports. These include to monitor the coverage by the broadcast media of political and human rights issues during the political transition programme in Nigeria, to ascertain whether:

- a. There are guidelines for direct-access programming laid down by the Electoral Commission and if direct access programmes are being used
- b. The programmes are live or taped
- c. The programmes include “actuality” - recordings of the candidates in their own words and voices
- d. The programmes allow candidates and parties to explain their platforms and views
- e. The programmes give voters the opportunity to form opinions about the character of each candidate, their platforms and parties
- f. All the parties and candidates have equal time and similar programme formats
- g. The parties’ programmes are aired at similar times during the day
- h. The broadcasting slot is given free of charge
- i. Airtime is paid for, and whether it can be said that no discounts were given to specific parties
- j. There are arbitrary restrictions on the format of the materials

Further, the objectives include:

- k) To provide a barometer for the broadcast media to measure their performance in reporting on human rights and political issues and undertake adjustments to bring themselves in conformity with international standards of fairness in the coverage of

15. *ibid* p. 53, paragraph 7.8

such issues.

l) To publish regular reports which will draw attention to patterns of inequitable reporting, inadequacy of political coverage, and provide a framework upon which a programme of reforms in the broadcast industry can be embarked upon.

m) To provide a basis upon which the in-coming democratically elected civilian government in Nigeria can undertake comprehensive legal and structural reforms in the regulation of broadcast stations in order to enhance the democratic process.

In summary, the project aims at identifying the manner and amount of coverage the broadcast media is giving to the political process and how disposed government is in assisting the media in this respect.

2 GENERAL CONSIDERATION FOR PRINT MEDIA MONITORING

There are two principal aspects that have been considered in this project. These are:

(a) Government

Considering the anxiety and suspicions of Nigerians regarding the sincerity of the military to relinquish power, analysis is made of governments' actions to determine its impartiality in conducting the political transition programme. This is specifically in relation to government's actions, or its failures, to ensure the media's right to gather and impart information.

Also considered, is the media's ability to criticise activities or inaction of the government on matters relating to the transition process, to investigate corruption, bias and to operate independently of political pressures. This could be hindered by prior restraints, usually pursuant to laws on broadcasting of materials concerning certain subjects.

Lastly, government's action or inaction to reports of persecution of broadcasters / proprietors of broadcast stations, or attacks on the press for performing legitimate professional duties. In a nut-shell, how the government acts to ensure the news media's right to gather and impart information and ideas. This shall all combine to answer the objectives number "1", "11" and "14".

We shall consider these in terms of the General and Legal Environment.

(b) The Broadcast Media

Considering the role of the broadcast media in helping to ensure the enthronement and sustenance of democracy, the questions to be addressed shall be as

spelt-out in the objectives. In sum total it shall address the following:

- (a) How the broadcast media acts to provide access to political parties and candidates so that they may effectively communicate with the public during the political transition process.
- (b) How the broadcast media act to ensure fair and objective coverage of political parties and candidates in news and information reporting.
- (c) How the broadcast media act to educate the electorate on how and why to vote.

However, having due regard to the objectives of this exercise as outlined above, and considering the fact that developments in the political arena changed from electioneering politicking, at the end of the presidential elections in February and considering the role of of the broadcast media in helping not just to ensure the enthronement but also the sustenance of democracy, considerations for monitoring the broadcast media were slightly altered with respect to hitherto german issues . The consideration for broadcast media monitoring for this report include:

- (a) How the broadcast media reports on allegations of electoral fraud and generates investigative reports and discourse thereof.
- (b) How the broadcast media reports on issues of accountability in governance and generates discourse in this regard.
- (c) How the broadcast media perceives and reports on loyal opposition.
- (d) How the broadcast media reports on issues regarding post-election democratic development and generates discourse in this regard.

3. ASSESSING HOW THE GOVERNMENT ACTS TO ENSURE FREE MEDIA ACCESS TO POLITICAL NEWS SOURCES AND PROTECTION FROM HARASSMENT

(a) General Environment

The mass media atmosphere in Nigeria during the month under review enjoyed a breath of fresh air as it did during all the other months of the monitoring exercise. These are the months of December 1998 to April 1999. This is after a seemingly endless suffocating working environment that pervaded the media industry during the regime of the late Head of State, General Sani Abacha.

Upon assumption of office last June, the out-gone Head of State, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, sought a cordia relationship with the mass media. Chief among the approaches

16. *See Airwaves Scorecard - February 1999*

used was the release of journalists jailed by the late General Sani Abacha regime on charges of being “accessories after the fact of treason”, as well as the general ease in the hostilities directed at the press by the previous government.

This led to healthy atmosphere for journalists in the practice of their profession.

(b) Legal Environment

In spite of the cessation of hostilities, as it were, caution continued to be the watchword for the media until the month of May under review. Journalists and media workers continued to see many landmines along their way. Just as General Abubakar eased the siege on the mass media and opened the prison doors to jailed journalists, he retained until the month under review, the legal framework and structures which made the practice of journalism under General Abacha the darkest period for the Nigerian media. The decrees employed for the arrest and detention of journalists as well as the violation of other media rights remained intact until the end of his regime.

With the benefit of hindsight and past experiences, applying those decrees was discretionary for military heads of state. Exercising that discretion did not require an elaborate plan. Just a change of mood by the head of state over a comment, question or remark, could have triggered off a rash of arrests and detentions in a few days. It was no wonder therefore that no matter the proclaimed humane intentions of the General Abubakar’s regime, the press did not entirely let down its guards.

Indeed, indications that the press truly needed to be watchful was given in December 1998, when it was reported that a decree which bars live debate among political parties candidates, was on the way. According to *The Punch* newspaper in its issue of December 23, 1998, this indication was given by the Director General of the National Orientation Agency (NOA), Professor Elo Amucheazi.

Besides, the then Minister for Information, Chief John Nwodo Jnr., was reported to have indicated in that same month, that government was in the process of making libel a criminal offence.

Since the disclosures, government did not react to deny them. It was not, therefore, taking pessimism to an absurd level that Nigerians were suspicious of General Abubakar throughout the transition period until the month under review, when he handed over to an elected civilian government.

For the press, in general, it also indicated that they actually needed a long spoon to dine with General Abubakar, late General Abacha’s number three man, and especially with the continued presence of military officers who were fingered to have aided late General Sani Abacha in his war on the press.

A major legislation which threatens media freedoms in the coverage or criticism of the political transition programme, was the Transition to Civil Rule (Political Programme) Decree No. 1 of 1996.

Although, a creation of the regime of the late General Abacha, the decree remained in force until handing over day on May 29, available for use at the government’s discretion.

The decree stipulates a punishment of five years imprisonment for any person who organises, plans, encourages, aids, cooperates or conspires with any other person to undermined, prevent or in any way do any act to forestall or prejudice the realisation of the political programme; “or any person who does or attempts to do any act to counsel, persuade, encourage, organise, mobilize, pressurize or threaten another person to join with him or with any other person or persons to misrepresent, accuse or distort the details, implications or purports of any item of the political programme”.

The sweeping nature of the provisions, provided a wide latitude for the government or its officials to apply the decree in censoring media criticisms of the transition programme.

Another decree which directly threatened media freedom with regard to the transition programme is the Offensive Publications (Proscription) Decree No. 35 of 1993.

Promulgated by the government of General Ibrahim Babangida, the decree provided for the proscription, seizure and confiscation of any publication, including of course broadcast medium, which in the opinion of the head of state, was likely to:

- “(a) disrupt the process of democracy and peaceful transition to civil rule having regard to its contents; or
- (b) hinder or prevent the progress and process of the grassroot democracy as established by the transition to civil rule programme; or
- (c) disturb the peace and public order of Nigeria”

The decree ousts the jurisdiction of the courts to inquire into any question whether any of the fundamental rights provisions in the 1979 Constitution or the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights have been violated by an order made pursuant to the provisions of the decree. It remained in force until May 29, when the military handed power to a democratically elected civilian government.

Other decrees which did not specifically restrict media access to political stories but restricted media freedoms generally, included:

1. The State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree No. 2 of 1984 (as amended), which allowed for the indefinite and incommunicado detention, without charge or trial, of any person perceived to threaten the security of the state;
2. The Constitution (Suspension and Modification) Decree No. 107 of 1993, which suspends a person’s constitutional rights to compensation or public apology if he were found to have been unlawfully arrested or detained;
3. The Federal Military (Supremacy and Enforcement of Powers) Decree No.12 of 1994, which prohibits legal challenges to any military decree or to any action which violates the human rights provisions of the Constitution;
4. The Treason and Other Offences (Special Military Tribunal) Decree No. 1 of 1986, under which five journalists were tried and convicted on charges of being “accessories after the fact

to treason” in the 1995 and 1997 alleged coup plots;

5. Treason and Treasonable Offences Decree No. 29 of 1993, which provided for a sentence of death to be imposed upon any person who utters any word, displays anything, or publishes any material which the military interprets as capable of breaking up Nigeria;

6. The Nigerian Press Council Decree No. 85 of 1992. Although touted as an avenue for those who feel maligned by the press to seek redress, its independence is compromised by the fact that the President has power to appoint the Chairman of the Council based on the recommendation of the Minister of Information. The presence in the Council of representatives of government controlled media such as the News Agency of Nigeria and the Nigerian Television Authority, and by the fact that it is government funded, all point to the likely possibility of lack of independence. All these facts were reinforced by the fact that the Council did not move to assert its authority when extra-legal measures were adopted by the government to repress the media.

7. Also, the broadcast media was hampered in its political report during the month under review and indeed throughout the transition period by the National Broadcasting Commission Decree No. 38 of 1992, which established a National Broadcasting Commission with powers to licence and supervise radio and television stations. Its lack of genuine independence from government can be seen from the fact that its members are government appointed. It only recommends an application for radio or television licence to the minister of information who in turn recommends to the president on whom the power to grant or reject an approval lies.

8. Not to be left out is the provisions of Decree No. 35 of 1998 discussed in earlier pages which greatly restricted the broadcast media political programming during the month under review and as well throughout the entire transition period.

All the above considered, the only valid inference possible is that the government did not provide an enabling legal environment for unfettered media coverage of the transition process. The only reason why the press still performed as they did in spite of this obvious lapse, is because they have become all too familiar with working under an insecure atmosphere.

4 ASSESSING THE BROADCAST MEDIA AS IT GENERATES AND REPORTS ON ALLEGATIONS OF ELECTORAL FRAUD, ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNANCE, LOYAL OPPOSITION AND POST-ELECTION DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

(a) Limitations

The period to be covered by the entrie project remains six months, from December 1998, to May 1999, when the transition programme was concluded. However, this report

focuses on the monitoring of the broadcast media in the month of May 1999.

Naturally, since the focus of this exercise is on daily broadcast monitoring and is on-going, there are obviously new developments to report. At the beginning of this exercise, a time frame limitation was set at six months i.e December 1998 to May 1999. The reason being that this month were expected to witness much political activities. The following variables were to form the basis of the monitoring exercise and inferences. But without prejudice to the aims and objective set at the beginning of this exercise, the variables which hitherto formed the basis of the focus and analysis were altered beginning from the April report, to accommodate the changes in media focus noticed during the month of March, due to the conclusion of elections slated to take place during this transition programme, are similarly employed for this report.

The variables which formed the basis of a monitoring exercise and inferences at the beginning of the project were:

(i) Stories on Government Activities

We shall consider the stories generated from government activities, conducts and pronouncements bordering on the transition programme and how they are broadcast.

(ii) Stories on INEC

This includes stories generated from the activities of the commission through press conferences, interviews by its officials and any civic education programme sponsored by the commission.

(iii) Stories on APP, PDP and AD.

This includes stories generated from the three main political parties, individually and jointly, through press conferences, campaigns, rallies, debates, meetings and others. The length of time given each party or candidate.

(iv) Informed Commentaries

This includes programmes where political analysts are interviewed on their views about particular political issues or conduct of elections or the transition programme in general. This may also include opinion polls.

(v) Voter Education

This is aimed at programmes that educate the voters. It shall consider the use of the broadcast media to reach groups that may have traditionally lower voting patterns in order to encourage them to vote. Such programmes might be sponsored by the media organisation themselves or by INEC.

(vi) Advertisement / Direct Access

This shall include programmes sponsored by political parties or their candidates to

inform the public of their programmes or intention to contest. It will also look at advertisement taken out in between some other non-political programmes.

However, to accommodate the changes in the political transition programme, the following variables were adopted for the April and May reports under this project. These variables also form the basis of the monitoring exercise and inferences for this report. They include:

(b) Variables

In order to assess the broadcast media on the above considerations, the following variables were taken into consideration.

(1) Reports on Allegations of Electoral Fraud

Considered here are how the various broadcast stations monitored reported on and treated allegations of electoral fraud by politicians and political parties. The questions addressed include whether such allegations of electoral fraud were treated lightly or seen as a serious matter capable of undermining the credibility of the transition process and hence deserving proper scrutiny?

Or whether such allegations of electoral fraud though seen as having serious implications on the political transition programme, were down-played because they also are a matter capable of providing an excuse for ambitious military officers to use as a pretext to truncate the transition programme?

(2) Reports on Accountability in Governance

Considered here are how the various broadcast stations monitored reported on and treated pronouncements on accountability in governance by politicians and political parties.

The questions addressed include whether the broadcast stations monitored reported such pronouncements with deserving seriousness or with skepticism, either because of the antecedents of the politicians or political parties making such comments or as a result of a lingering doubt, due to the seeming incredulous nature of Nigerians owing to the mind bogging allegations and proven cases of corruption in government? Also considered are programmes by the broadcast stations on ensuring accountability in governance.

(3) Reports on Loyal Opposition

Treated here are cases of how the broadcast stations reported comments of opposition parties and politicians in the political arena. Knowing that an

essential bench mark of democratic evolution is checks and balances provided by various bodies and institutions, amongst them the minority party(ies), the question to be addressed is how do the broadcast stations treat opposing views by opposition party(ies) and politician(s)?

Does the treatment connote one of a constitutional right on the part of the party(ies) or politician(s) taking opposing position or one of a spoiler?

(4) Reports on Post-Election Democratic Development

Considered here are reports and programmes which aim directly to strengthen or weaken post-election democratic development or, indirectly, reports and programmes by the broadcast stations which emanate from the activities of government and political parties with respect to strengthening the development of democratic institutions.

For example, how did the broadcast stations react to and report on cases of legal recourse by candidates and parties which lost elections? Knowing that due legal process and the rule of law are an integral part of democracy, did the broadcast stations see and report those as a basic test of democracy or did they perceive and report such as capable of weakening the democratic process?

How are the broadcast stations reporting and generating programmes with respect to how the government is preparing for the success of the in-coming civilian administration? This is viewed both in terms of training of personnel that will work with the civilians and giving legal backing to the various stages of the transition process already concluded as well as the promulgation of the Constitution which is to be the guide rule for governance for the envisaged civilian democracy?

(5) Others

These consist of all other reports and programmes having political references which, however, could not be grouped under the aforementioned variables

5. ABOUT THE TELEVISION AND RADIO STATIONS MONITORED FOR THIS REPORT

Understandably, the coverage given by a particular radio / television station to the political transition programme as a whole and the various variables listed above, will most likely be a function of the economic, political and ideological bent of such a radio / television

station.

This, itself, is also likely to be a function of the ownership / administrative structure of the radio / television station, target audience as well as its basic philosophy. In this wise, a few words on the ownership structure, target audience and philosophy of the radio / television monitored, is hereunder presented.

But it should be noted that being privately owned, the ownership structure of some of the radio / television station are not known for certain. What is known are all set forth below.

Despite our inability to publish in this monitoring report, the monitoring exercise for African Independent Television (AIT), Lagos, we, however, have reproduce along with others the background discussion of this station.

(i) AFRICA INDEPENDENT TELEVISION (AIT) & RAY POWER 100.5 F.M

Africa Independent Television (AIT) and Ray Power 100.5 F.M are two of the broadcast stations that were established following the 1992 deregulation of the broadcast media by the federal government. They are owned by Chief Raymond Dokpesi, of Afemai stock in Edo State.

Once into shipping, Chief Dokpesi had a stint in politics during the earlier part of the aborted General Babangida's Third Republic transition programme.

Known to be very close to some politicians, he is believed to still nurse political ambitions but is bidding his time in the main. He is, however, not unlikely to use his broadcast stations to gain some political influence and, of course, make some money, where possible.

The stations have recently gone network. Their headquarters is in Lagos and they have another office in Abuja. But they can be viewed or listen to in Aba, Kano, Abuja and, of course, some states around Abuja. They are also received in all the Yoruba speaking states of western Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. They are well funded and adequately equipped to transmit events to the public with capable and experienced hands-Broadcasters, Presenters and Producers.

Before now, AIT and Ray Power 100.5 F.M, two of the foremost independent television and radio stations, were known as an entertainment television and radio stations, because of the nature of their programmes. However, since the beginning of the transition programme, there has been a lot of changes in the programmes and programming. The stations have become more serious in their coverage of political issues. New programmes have been introduced and old ones converted to political programmes.

(ii) MiNAJ SYSTEM TELEVISION

MiNAJ System Television is a private-owned television station situated in Obosi, Anambra State. It is owned by Chief Mike Ajegbo, a businessman, who also owns a radio station and a cable television. A law graduate from the University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University, and a graduate of the famous Harvard Business School, Boston, Massachusetts, United States, where he trained as a manager of human and material resources.

He is also the Chairman of Obosi Community Bank, Director IPTC (West Africa) Limited, Director Coral International Insurance Company limited and Bouygues Nigeria Limited.

His first foray into the political arena was as a member of the Nigerian Constituent Assembly. He was later to be a member of the General Abacha regime's National Constitutional Conference and the National Reconciliation Committee.

However, early during the month under review, Chief Ajegbo declared his intention to vie for a Senatorial seat in the state.

(iii) RADIO NIGERIA, ABUJA

The Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, otherwise known as Radio Nigeria, is the national radio of the government of the federation. It is wholly owned by the government and is supervised by the Federal Ministry of Information.

Over seventy years old, it has evolved through these years to its present five zonal structure with offices in Lagos, Ibadan, Kaduna, Enugu and Abuja, its Headquarters.

Although its motto is "to uplift the nation and unite the people", like most third world government media, its editorial policy is tied to what the government of the day is doing, good or bad, whether it unites the people or not.

Because of this posture, it has lost a lot of credibility especially in the recent past when Nigeria suffered serious military dictatorship. Yet this has not detracted or completely degraded its power to propagate a view point or an individual especially as it still holds the monopoly of being the only network radio in Nigeria with powerful short-wave transmitters.

The zonal structure of the corporation confers on the zones, otherwise known as national stations, some level of autonomy, especially in the editorial and programme matters. Each zone has its own staff, correspondents, programmes etc. It only joins the network service for news and other special broadcast and programmes.

The zones correspond loosely to the geopolitical and linguistic grouping of the country. Under the Kaduna zonal station are most of the core northern states. The station is mandated

to cover Kaduna, Niger, Bauchi, Plateau, Sokoto, Kebbi, Zamfara, Borno, Yobe and Katsina states. The Ibadan zonal station is mandated to cover all the Yoruba speaking states made up of Lagos, Ondo, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti and Ogun, including Edo, Kwara, Delta and Kogi States in its programmes and news.

The Enugu zonal station covers all Igbo speaking states of Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia and Ebonyi, including Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Cross Rivers as well as Benue States.

The Lagos zonal station is hitherto the network service. But with the movement of the seat of government to Abuja, it is for all intents and purposes now the Abuja zonal station that is now the Headquarters even though it is yet to be pronounced so. But all network programmes now originate from Abuja which has been on air since October 1980.

To understand FRCN's coverage of the transition to civil rule programme and its election, a knowledge of its broadcast history is necessary.

The corporation, since Independence, has had very little experience in broadcasting in a democratic set up. Even during the periods of democratic experimentations (1960-1966 and 1979-1983), the corporation operated under a command control structure. The government in power owns it and so it ministered to the whims and caprices of that government. The issue of public trust and public ownership did not arise and does not even today.

In the African cosmology nay Nigeria, there is no word for opposition. You are either an enemy or a friend. You fight your enemy with every weapon you possess including the media you control. Nigeria's long years of military rule has brutalised the psyche of the average Nigerian and most Nigerian have become dictatorial even in their civic life. The FRCN as an institution, has not escaped this. So much so that even in a benevolent dictatorship, as Nigeria has now, the station reads the mind of government and does what it thinks the government wants. It is self censorship at its best and crudest form.

It would be supposed that a station that has bowed to every desire of government would be well funded and adequately equipped. Paradoxically, the contrary is the case. It is perhaps the most backward station of its size and status in Africa especially in the area of technical know-how. Hence, some of the lapses that may be found in its coverage of the political transition programme, will not be as a result of deliberate policies, but pure technical inadequacy to reach where the events took place, source for the message and put it out to the public. It could have fine ideas but not the know-how to implement it.

Presently, what it calls the network service is a studio in Abuja with telephone lines linking all the zonal stations. The news is produced in Abuja and read in that studio. It has to

be carried by telephone lines to short-wave transmitters in Kaduna, Ibadan and Enugu. There is no short wave transmitter in Abuja.

The network service does not run programmes, it only opens at 7.00am to read the news and shuts down. It opens again at 4.00pm, 7.00pm and 10.00pm for the news and shuts down afterwards, everyday. Hence, it broadcasts two hours of news everyday.

During this transition programme, it introduced a 15 minutes political education program called "Platform" which runs on Mondays and Thursdays at 7.30pm.

But the real culprit in the corporations ineptitude in covering the elections is Commercialisation.

Commercialisation came on stream in 1987, as a result of dwindling revenue from government. It was supposed to be a partial commercialisation of the operation of the corporation. But today, there are no dividing lines. All programmes and every airtime is sold to the highest bidder. News is sold. Investigations reveal that the radio's airtime often given persons and corporate bodies is paid for. A political jingle on the network service would cost about N90,000 per minute.

No government agency or parastatal is spared of Radio Nigeria's mercantilism, except that agency has a direct influence to its capital expenditure subvention which still comes from government.

Perhaps the real problem is the inability or refusal of the operators of such a public trust as Radio Nigeria distinguish between what is social, what is information, what is for public good and what is commercial or is not commercial.

But the government itself does not feel perturbed at this state of affairs, neither does it see a need to right the anomaly. It has failed to provide an appropriate guideline that takes into consideration the social responsibility of the medium.

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), has tried to instil some sense of social responsibility on the corporation, especially as it relates to election broadcasts. It directed that all political broadcasts should be free and all parties given equal access to the media. Unfortunately, the NBC has no control over the FRCN whatsoever. In defiance of the NBC directive, the Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria (BON), met and fixed rates for political broadcasts.

Also, presently, the station is a bit timid, a bit too sensitive and afraid to place any foot wrong bearing in mind its recent heinous past when it so vociferously campaigned for the self-succession bid of late head of state. It is treading softly and in the process, it is bungling.

The above serve as a background and reasons for what might be observed as the political

transition broadcast in the network service of the FRCN.

(iv) NIGERIAN TELEVISION AUTHORITY (NTA), ABUJA

The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Abuja, is a government-owned broadcast medium. It is the headquarters of the long chain of NTA stations that are all over the country. They are all under the Ministry of Information and have an overall boss with the designation of Director-General.

It is note worthy to observe that the history of NTA has been one of propaganda for any government in power. What is said of FRCN can also be said of NTA especially as it relates to its attitude to reporting government and its activities. It has similarly met with credibility problem for reason of its no-hold barrel support for any government in power especially the regime of late General Sani Abacha.

Each station has at its head, a director. It is also has its programme schedule in the main . All the stations, however, usually link-up for network programmes, including the 9.00pm daily network news.

NTA Abuja, aside from network political programmes, did not have its own political programmes during the month under review. It featured, as did most of the other NTA stations, only network service political programmes. This situation made the majority of NTA Abuja political broadcast, quite uninteresting as viewers did not have the opportunity to watch aspirants to their immediate political offices and assess them before elections.

(v) NIGERIAN TELEVISION AUTHORITY, KADUNA

On March 25, 1962, the first Premier of the Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, opened the Broadcasting Corporation of Nigeria (BCN). Under the umbrella of the BCN, Radio, Television of Kaduna (RTK) started broadcasting.

The station was set up essentially to counter the “negative” and “hostile” posture of the Southern press, as opposed too an infinite belief in the socio-political importance of broadcast stations in themselves.

This agenda was firmly pursued until 1977, during General Obasanjo’s regime, the federal government took over the television section, thus becoming Nigerian Television Authority.

6. PRESENTATION OF RESULT OF THE BROADCAST MEDIA MONITORING FOR THE MONTH OF MAY 1999.

The month of May marks the end of General Abdusalam Abubabak administration transitions programm. It witnessed the handing-over to an elected civilian administration.

The month was particularly very active political wise.

i. **Radio Nigeria, Abuja**

Political broadcasts on Radio Nigeria, Abuja opened with a report on May 1, about a pledge by Nigeria Labour Congress President that labour will not be partisan in its demands for workers so that democracy will be sustained.

On May 2, the Head of State called on politicians to avoid acts that can hinder the enthronement of democracy in the country.

In its bulletin of May 3, AD's Acting National Chairman, Chief Ayo Adebayo, was reported to have said that the party would participate in Chief Obasanjo's government if he agrees on restructuring and convening of a national sovereign conference. In the same bulletin a member of the PDP's board of trustees, Alhaji Isiyallu Ibrahim, was reported to have warned that if politicians do not tolerate one another the democratic process would collapse.

On May 4, the station reported the Head of State as saying that the in-coming government would not be saddled with problems that could threaten the peace and orderliness of the society.

On May 5, the station reported that Alhaji Ahmed Jidda, a chieftain of the PDP, had called on the AD and APP to form a credible opposition to the PDP government.

On May 6, the Imo State Military Administrator, Colonel Tanko Zubairu, called on legislators-elect to promote laws that would help enhance the development of the nation.

On May 7, the president-elect told traditional rulers that his government was prepared to accept constructive criticism and suggestions for the best of the country.

It was reported on May 8, that bye-elections would be held in ten states and Abuja as well as a programme of events for the hand-over of government to civilians. 'Platform' a network political programme focused on the gains of the world tour by president-elect. It featured a press briefing by Alhaji Abubakar Rimi. The 'Thank you' tour of the president-elect was carried as he pledged to be fair to all Nigerians.

A report on May 9, said the Head of State urged members-elect of the National Assembly to work towards the unity and development of the country. There was also a civic education news commentary as the impediments to true democracy.

On May 10, it was reported that INEC would carry out a comprehensive review of its activities.

The bulletin of May 11 reported a joint meeting of the elected members of APP and AD. The APP Chairman, Mammud Waziri, urged them to be resolute in their pursuit and

defence of democracy. AD Chairman, Chief Adebajo, also addressed the meeting. There was report of a workshop for legislators-elect from Bauchi State where the Military Administrator assured them of a conducive working environment.

On May 12, 'Platform' focused on the Head of State's meeting with political parties' leaders.

The bulletin for May 13, reported that the appeal tribunal has upheld the election Chief Mike Ajaegbo as the duly elected Senator for his constituency.

On May 14, there were reports that the Head of State met with governors-elect and the Supreme Court ordered that the PDP deputy governor of Adamawa State be elevated to the post of governor. There was a civic education commentary on democratic rule. Also the network political programme broadcast at 7.30pm also reported the opinions of some Senators-elect on some national issues.

The Head of State was reported on May 15, to have called on governors-elect to exercise their constitutional authority and power with a sense of caution and responsibility.

President-elect General Obasanjo was quoted in the bulletin of May 17, that he would run an open and transparent administration. It was reported also that the Clerk of the National Assembly, Alhaji Salim, said the workshop on parliamentary process being put together by his office was to ensure efficiency and effectiveness.

On May 18, the president-elect was reported to have called for debt forgiveness for Nigeria. In the same bulletin, Justice Akpata called for true independence for INEC in a civilian setting through financial allocation to the commission from the Consolidated Revenue Funds.

The station reported that briefings for the in-coming civilian administration started on May 19. Also in the bulletin, it was reported that INEC has presented certificates of election to governors-elect in the 36 states. There was also a civic education news commentary on politics of ideals. A jingle calling for support for democracy was also aired.

The president-elect on May 20 inaugurated a ten-man hand-over committee and called for a three-day fasting and prayer for the nation.

On May 21, it was reported that the Head of State had called on Nigerians to cooperate with the in-coming administration in laying a solid foundation for democracy. In the same bulletin, the president-elect said a unit would be set up to monitor the implementation of his policies. Prof. Ibrahim Gambari, Nigeria's Permanent Representative at the UN, in a hand-over public lecture called for true federalism. 'Platform' the network political programme looked at the challenges of INEC under a democratic government. It also

highlighted the expectations Nigerians from the National Assembly. The Chief of General Staff called on Nigerians to actively participate in the politics of the Fourth Republic.

On May 25, it was reported that Eagle Square, venue for the hand-over has been commissioned, while the president-elect said under his leadership Nigeria would fight for democracy. A PDP chieftain, Mr. Imo Iboko Imo, was reported to have called for an anti corruption agency throughout the country.

‘Platform’ of May 26, focused on the National Assembly. It called for a purposeful assembly for the sustenance of democracy. The bulletin on May 27 was filled with reports of the final preparations for the hand-over. The Head of State, at a farewell dinner, advised the in-coming administration to work for the welfare of Nigerians. There was a report of the farewell broadcast by the Head of State. Other reports were of the arrivals of dignitaries; foreign Heads of State for the hand-over ceremony. The Head of State was reported to have called on Nigerians to rededicate themselves to the values of honor and service.

On May 29, it was reported that General Obasanjo had been sworn-in and that he has promised to run an open and transparent government. There was a civic education commentary on the emergence of democracy in Nigeria.

Reports on May 30 informed among other things, that the President has appointed Service Chiefs, Secretary to the Government and other personal staff. There was a commentary, on the task before the new President.’

ii. Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), Abuja

The month of May in NTA Abuja’s broadcast was high in political stories even if somewhat restricted. With the conclusion court cases, at least the high profile ones, broadcast was restricted to the world tour by the president-elect, preparations for bye-elections, handing-over activities etc.

NTA Abuja depends on the network service of the NTA for its news and political programmes. The station, however, broadcast a local news bulletin at 7p.m. everyday, with translations in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. On weekends it broadcasts a news bulletin at mid-day and another at 4 p.m. in addition to the one at 7p.m. The station, however, broadcasts a lot of political jingles irrespective of the national network.

During the month under review, the station broadcast several news bulletins. Some of the bulletins were live, mostly on the activities relating to the handing-over. Other reports focused on activities relating to the completion of democratic structures such as the National Assembly complex, the Eagle Square, legislators’ residential accommodation etc. There were also several workshops and seminars for governors and legislators-elect. There were

briefings for in-coming executives by the out-going ones. Orientation courses for staff of the National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly were also in focus in the bulletins.

After these, the president-elect came next as the most focused on political figure in the station's news bulletins during the month under review. Several of his utterances and activities came under focus and analysis. There was a tendency by the station to see every issue from the president-elect's perspective. For instance, his views on privatisation and the PDP organised workshop on the Economic Agenda for the Fourth Republic were reflected in this manner.

The station aired a documentary on the president-elect on May 27. The documentary made effort to present the president-elect in a positive light.

iii. Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), Kaduna

Political broadcasts on the station during the month of May, started with a report on the nomination of Alhaji Ibrahim Buhari as the North West zone candidate for Speaker of the House of Representatives in the National Assembly.

On May 3, the Provisional Ruling Council's preparation on the handing-over ceremony was reported as well as a lecture by Professor Jubril Aminu on economic changes to be expected in a democratic society.

The Hausa version of the station's news broadcast "*Taskar Labarai*" of May 4, reported that the Kaduna State Military Administrator had enlightened members of the Federal Road Safety Commission and the Police Force on their expected role in the new dispensation. This was omitted in the English broadcast. Political news and programmes continued to feature between May 5 and 13.

As from May 14, reports on preparations for the hand-over ceremony heated up and the number of political stories on the daily bulletins went up.

The presentation of election certificates to Kaduna State legislators-elect was aired on the May 19 bulletin.

On May 23, there were reports on changes to be expected as the civilian rule moves nearer and the role of women in a democratic era.

On May 25 and 26, the preparations at the "Murtala Mohammed Square" where the handing-over ceremony to the state Governor-elect was to take place, came under focus. Also reported were utterances and activities of the president-elect, which continued to receive prominence on the station. There were also reports on the governor-elect of the state, Ahmed Makarfi, who talked about his agenda for the state on one of the news broadcast.

In addition, there was a special 30 minutes report on the governor-elect's profile

aired on May 27. Each minute of the programme counted positive for the governor-elect.

Another special programme was aired on the legislators-elect's meeting at the House of Assembly on May 28. This took 15 minutes.

iv. Ray Power 100.5, Lagos

The station's focus of attention during the month of May under review, was the preparation for the inauguration of a civilian administration, which took place on Saturday May 29 1999. Other areas of focus were the trips (local and international) of the President-elect, General Olusegun Obasanjo, his remarks and speeches at various occasions particularly on government parastatals such as National Electric Power Authority (NEPA), as well as ad-hoc bodies including Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF).

The station utilised its wide-reach to cover all the pre-inauguration and inauguration activities. But unfortunately, after a much-publicised promise of live broadcast of the handing-over ceremony, the station was off air throughout the period from May 27 till the end of the month. This was reportedly due to damages to its transmitting facilities by thunder and rainstorm.

During the month under review, the public enlightenment programme, 'Factfile' neglected its political focus and concentrated on non-political issues such as Child Abuse (May 10), Increase in Oil Price (May 18) and Role of Nutrition (May 26). The programme, however, made reference to the new political dispensation on May 25 which featured the topic: 'Agenda for the President' and on May 26, on the topic: 'Assessing the Military Regime'.

v. MiNAJ Systems Television, Obosi

Political news reports on the station during the month under review began on May 2, with an in-depth report on the jostling for offices by politicians. The PDP's was reported to be insistent on a lion share of the offices, while the AD and APP's were agitating for a constitutional provision catering for proportional representation. Two PDP members were interviewed on the issue of formation of government of National Unity and one each from AD and APP were also interviewed.

Between May 3 and 7, the station aired on its news broadcast, the Head of State, General Abdusalami Abubakar's advice to politicians to shun divisive tendencies and join hands with President-elect Obasanjo, to ensure a lasting democracy. The dismissal of an election petition against the result of Anambra South Senatorial zone was also reported and as well an order by the Court of Appeal to INEC to conduct a fresh gubernatorial election in Adamawa State.

On May 9 through 11, the station focused on the meeting between members of the National Assembly and General Abubakar and the utterances of President-elect Obasanjo, during some of his 'Thank you' tours.

On May 12, the station carried reports on the expected judgment, the following day on a petition challenging the election of Chief Mike Ajegbo, incidentally the owner of the station, as the Senator-elect of Anambra Central District. The station broadcast a detailed report on the matter.

On May 13, Ajegbo's victory at the tribunal was reported. His lawyer was interviewed as well as the petitioner's lawyer, Mr. Boniface Ozoma.

The station also aired an interview with the Oyo State governor-elect in which he promised to solve the water problem besetting the state.

The station reported that the Supreme Court held that Mr. Bonnie Haruna who contested as deputy governor of Adamawa State be sworn-in as governor in place of Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, now vice-president-elect. The President-elect, General Obasanjo was reported to have promised to give the economy special attention during a reception organised for him.

Between May 18 and 24, INEC's presentation of certificate of election to governors-elect was reported, and as well, the briefing of Enugu State governor-elect and his deputy by the military administrator of the state. President-elect, General Obasanjo's call for a 3-day fasting and prayer for the country was on the news. Various workshops on democracy were reported and as well, preparations for the hand-over ceremony and the release of the calendar for the ceremony were also reported within this period.

From May 25 to 30, the bulletins were dominated by political stories. There were as many as ten political news items in a day and sometimes there was hardly space or time for other stories.

The commissioning of the National Assembly complex and the Eagle Square, venue of the handing-over ceremony to the president-elect was aired on May 25.

A public lecture, as part of the handing-over ceremony was reported to have taken place. There was a focus on the statement by the speaker, Nigeria's Permanent Representative at the United Nations, Alhaji Ibrahim Gambari that legislators should initiate measures for a review of the 1999 Constitution within the first year of its inauguration.

The station also aired interviews with members of the public as their opinions were sought on the out-going military administrators, the Head of State and military leaders.

On May 28, General Abdusalami's farewell speech was broadcast and more reports on the preparations were also aired.

On May 29, the news bulletins were filled with reports on the handing-over ceremony and President Obasanjo's inauguration speech. There were also news on the handing-over ceremonies in various States and the maiden speeches of some governors, specifically of Delta, Anambra and Enugu States.

On May 30, stories relating to the inauguration of the previous day still dominated the news broadcast of the station.

7. ANALYSIS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(a) ANALYSIS

(i) Radio Nigeria, Abuja

On the network service of the FRCN there are four network news programmes of 30 minutes each at 7am, 4pm, 7pm and 10pm. There was also a 15 minutes political programme called PlatForm broadcast at 7.30pm on Monday with a repeat on Thursday at the same time. These would total to 64 hours of broadcast of news and the political programme 'Platform'. A 30 minutes news which is the standard for FRCN would contain about an average of 8 items of news (i.e. about 4 mins. Per item). The 64 hours of broadcast in May would have contained (64hrs x 4 minutes) 960 items of news of these 68 items pertained to political stories and events. This appreciates to about (68 items x 4 minutes) 4 ½ hours of the 64 hours of news broadcast or 7%.

Out of the 68 political news items in the May bulletins, 15 related to transparency in governance, two were on loyal opposition, another 15 related to post election democratic development while 36 related to other political issues.

(ii) Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), Abuja

It is noted that the NTA's political programming was at best ad-hoc and usually not sustained beyond any particular event. The rush for political programmes which pervaded most of January, February and March all died down. During the month under review, there was a glaring absence of 'Face the Nation'.

During the month under review, a total of 129 news items were monitored on the station. Out of these, 32 were on political issues and events. Ten related to transparency in governance, twelve were on post-election democratic development and ten were related to other political issues.

NTA Abuja could be commended for its programming in the areas of mobilization and enlightenment jingles on democracy. During the period under review, the station played

high quality well packaged jingles on participatory democracy as well as ideal of governance almost daily.

NTA Abuja could be faulted for what it did not do than what it did. For what it did, it did well. But it should be pointed out that the documentary on President Obasanjo was decidedly patronising and thus more of a public relation stunts for the in-coming civilian president. It ended up portraying the station as the month piece of any government in power. The programme, however, had some civic education value in support of democracy and civil governance in that it raised hope and expectation that the future is bright.

The station also left out some political events that were of much relevance. For example, it did not consider worthy of mention the joint workshop by AD and APP for their members-elect. Also was there no mention of the two parties' suggestions of the formation of a broad-based national government, which the AD gave as the condition for its participation in the in-coming civilian administration.

(iii) Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), Kaduna

The Nigerian Television Authority in Kaduna broadcast a high number of political news stories during the month of May under review. Although the station had stopped airing its special public enlightenment political programmes, it, however, catered for some of its viewer's thirst for political stories by increasing the number of political news items in its bulletin.

For a station fed by the network services for most of its major programmes, it should be commended for its political menu on the local news bulletins, which are broadcast daily for about 30 minutes, in English and an abridged version in Hausa.

Most of the reports on NTA Kaduna during the month under review were on government activities. But there were also some reports on civic education.

Out of the 119 news items monitored on the station during the month under review, 42 were on political issues and events. Ten related to transparency in governance, 14 were reports on post-elections democratic development and 18 related to other political issues not listed in the variables.

(iv) Ray Power FM, Lagos

The station, within the limits of its capabilities, expertise and facilities-wise, made the electronic media proud during the month under review. It could, however, have done more. Its attitude and desire to concentrate in many i.e. music, entertainment, politics and the economy with the same crop of staff on both radio (Ray Power 100.5), (Ray Power 106)

and Television (AIT) can only lead to a lackluster and direction-less performance.

Of the 207 news items monitored on the station during the month under review, 51 were on political issues and events. Of these 51 news stories, reports on post-election democratic development were five while issues relating to transparency in government were nine. Other political issues and events aired during the month were 37. There was nothing on loyal opposition and accusations of fraud.

The absence of stories relating to loyal opposition and accusation of fraud in the bulletin shows that such complaints and cases in that respect had all been addressed and all participants agreed for one reason or another to “let things be”.

(v) MiNAJ Systems Television, Oboosi

The preparations for the hand-over ceremony formed the main focus of the political broadcast of MiNAJ Systems Television during the month (May), under review. The station’s broadcasts were interesting and quite informative as the people’s expectations of elected officials, and promises of the officials were constantly reported.

The main source of political reports for viewers of the station during the month of May was its 7.30pm news broadcast tagged: ‘The World Tonight’.

The “Thank you” tour embarked upon by President-elect General Olusegun Obasanjo to the six geo-political zones in the country, his remarks at various occasions, the jostling for offices by politicians, hearing of election petitions and the conduct of bye-election also contributed to the attraction of political broadcast on the station during the month.

There was, however, at least one instance of bias reporting. For example, the report on the proceedings in the court case emanating from the petition against Chief Ajegbo’s election was lopsided. The station in a report of the tribunal’s proceeding aired the submission of Ajegbo’s lawyer for 1 minute 40 seconds while that of the petitioner’s lawyer was given 20 seconds. Also, after one of their court appearances, Ajegbo’s lawyer was interviewed for 36 seconds but there was nothing from the other lawyer.

During the month under review, there were 300 news items monitored on the station. Out of this total, 77 pertained to political issues and events. Reports on issues relating to accountability in governance were 22, post-election democratic development were also 22 while other political issues were 33. There was nothing on loyal opposition and allegations of electoral fraud.

Compared with the month of April, the station had a better report of political stories during the month under review. But it fell short of expectation, however, in the area of special political programming.

(B) CONCLUSION

The month of May under review being the last month of the transition programme witnessed a lot of political activities. These include workshops and seminars for legislators-elect and governors-elect, familiarisation tour by elected members of the state assembly, lectures on the roles of journalists in democracy, briefings of incoming governors-elect by the out-going military administrators. Renovation on the house of assembly was also highlighted in the bulletins. Stories on the preparation by the Provisional Ruling Council on the hand-over to civilian government were included in the news broadcast.

There was a remarkable increase in the airtime and attention

During the month under review, there was palpable evidence that democracy fever, which had caught up with virtually everybody in the country, was also embraced by the broadcast medium. There was excitement engendered by the hope of a new dispensation which could be felt in the voices of the presenters and seen on their faces as they presented their reports and read the news.

Meanwhile, it is worthwhile to note that Radio Nigeria, Abuja, focused more on the political activities and pronouncements of the Military government that was in power until may 28, more than other political issues. Stories on the Federal Military government's activities and pronouncements were 26 items, while those on the President were 15 items. Perhaps at the risk of accusing the station of still attempting to carry on its traditional role of being a government spokes-agent, it was only inevitable to achieve such a tilt due to the fact that it was the military government that modified the hand-over and the activities in this respect.

One notable feature of the station's May political news bulletins was the airing of civic education jingles with mobilisation values for democracy. This is a good development but interestingly (and unfortunately too) they were all externally generated from other governmental and non-governmental agencies other than the Radio Nigeria itself.

The station has come a long way in improving its broadcast to be more balanced during the month under review. But there were some gray areas in its broadcast. It missed out some political news stories which were not only important, but which also because of the station's national spread should have been filed in by a correspondent. For example, the judgement by a court that the deputy governor-elect of Adamawa State should be sworn-in due to the governor-elect having become the vice president-elect. Also, although the criteria for the monitoring exercise has been altered to accommodate the changing political issues, it is worthwhile to note that the station during the month under review focused more on the activities of the out-gone military government and the party waiting to take over governance.

The retention of “Platform” even after the elections is quite commendable especially its refocus on political issue during the month under review.

On its part, NTA Abuja needs to appreciate that a more and better reflection of the views of other parties is essential for the survival and entrenchment of a durable democratic culture. Thus its airtime should be made more open to other parties and divergent views. This is more especially necessary since the station is a public medium financed with public funds.

Also, the station should design political programmes, open to audience participation for regular rating of the politicians in government. Such audience participation programme should be an all time programme to continue to monitor and gauge the pulse of our infant democracy. It is not supposed to be aired during elections or campaigns and discontinued.

A democratic and political broadcast culture must begin to emerge from our electronic media. If such self-celebratory and ego-boosting “Towards a greater nation” can continue to run for years on the network why not a programme like “Face the Nation” or any other one that is designed to meet the viewers’ political needs in the present dispensation.

The political jingles should be translated into local languages in order to reach the grassroots.

Its Kaduna counterpart during the month under review generally had a good outing. But the station did not bring back the special political programmes such as ‘Enduring Polity’ and ‘Face the State’ which it aired during the months of December 1998 through March 1999, but rested in April.

Such programmes are of relevance to the democratic dispensation to sensitise the government and the governed to their individual roles. It is hoped that those programmes would be brought back on the air and adapted to suit the present dispensation.

The station needs to be commended for its continued translation of news in Hausa, which made it possible for more of its viewers to be reached and made aware of democratic developments.

As for Ray Power, the station had generally very commendable outing during the month under review. Unfortunately, however, after a much-publicised promise of live telecast of the handing-over ceremony, the station could not carry through its promises due to damages to its broadcasting equipment by rainstorm. However, during the month under review, the station discontinued some of its earlier public enlightenment political programmes and as well reduced the political content of ‘Fact-file’. It would have been more appropriate that the station continued using the programme to enlighten the listening public of developments in the political arena, which it (Fact-file) did during the months of January through to March.

The stations discontinuation of its news analyses was another low point in its political coverage during the month under review.

However, kudos should be given to the station for its consistency in airing relevant topics on 'Your Rights and Duties'. On May 4, the programme focused on laws that should go with the military. These it listed to include Decree 2 (detention without trial), the Failed Banks Decree, the Newspapers Registration Decree and some edicts promulgated by State governments.

MiNAJ Systems Television deserves a high commendation for its news broadcast during the month of May. Further, it deserves kudos for the efforts made in getting the peoples opinion on some political issues and also the views of some elected officers.

But there were, however, some flaws noticed in the station's political broadcast during the month. One of such is the lop-sided manner, the station reported on the court case involving its proprietor, Chief Ajegbo.

(c) RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the above analysis and conclusion, Media Rights Agenda yet again reiterates its previous recommendations that:

- * The Government should create a more conducive legal environment for media coverage of the transition programme by repealing all laws and decrees which inhibit the capacity of the media to report freely.

In particular, the Government should reconsider the provisions of Decree No. 35 of 1998 which limits to 30 minutes at the most the airtime a station may devote to a political party in a week during post-election period.

- * That the government should liberalised the process of broadcast media licencing.

- * That the government should enact policies and promote an environment that would encourage community broadcasting in Nigeria.

- * In view of the greater advantage of the broadcast medium over its print counterpart, government can enhance greater participation, as well as stimulate more citizen's interest in the political transition programme by initiating policies that will make radio and television sets more affordable for the masses.

- * It is also recommended that broadcast stations should introduce vernacular political programmes to cater for the barely literate and less privileged Nigerians. They too deserve to know more about political developments and participate in the running of government.

- * It is recommended that elections slated to take place under this transition

programme having been completed, special political programmes introduced as a result of the transition elections should now focus on discussing other political issues such as accountability in governance, loyal opposition and post election democratic development. In this way, many of these programmes will continue to remain relevant, rather than be discontinued.

Error Margin

We admit an error margin of plus or minus five in data collection.



Media Rights Agenda (MRA) is an independent, non-governmental organisation established for the purpose of promoting and protecting press freedom and freedom of expression in Nigeria. The MRA is registered under Nigerian law and has Observer Status with the African Commission on Human and People's Rights. MRA's Aims and Objectives are:

- a. to promote respect and recognition for press freedom and freedom of expression in Nigeria;
- b. to provide protection and support for journalists and writers engaged in the lawful pursuit of their professional duties;
- c. to promote the highest standards of professional ethics, integrity, training and conduct in the journalism profession; and
- d. to bring about a conducive social and legal atmosphere for the practice of journalism, and ensure the protection of the journalist's right not to be compelled to work against his or her conviction or disclose confidential sources of information.

Executive Committee

Edetaen Ojo, Executive Director
Tunde Fagbohunlu, Director of Legal Services
Morenike Ransome-Kuti, Director of Research
Austin Agbansuremi, Director of Publications
Eze Anaba, Director of Projects
Tive Denedo, Director of Campaigns
Josephine Izuagie, Treasurer
Anselm Chidi Odinkalu, Member

Secretariat

Edetaen Ojo, Executive Director
Osaro Odemwingie, Publications Officer
Maxwell Kadiri, Legal Officer
Bukky Ogunlade, Legal Officer
Michael Ogwo, Programme Officer
Ayode Longe, Programme Officer
Kolade Fadahunsi, Programme Officer
Joy Kadiri, Accountant
Ademoyewa Johnson, Litigation Officer
Mercy Jones Epete, Litigation Officer
Oluwabunmi Oke, Secretary
Nneka Ojumah, Secretary
Yunus A. Abdusalam, Administrative Assistant
Rose Aikhuele, Office Assistant

Media Rights Agenda,

44, Alhaja Kofoworola Crescent, Off Obafemi Awolowo Way, Ikeja,
P. O. Box 52113, Ikoyi, Lagos, Nigeria
Tel: 234-1-4930831, Fax: 234-1-4930831.
E-mail: mra@rcl.nig.com
Web site: www.internews.org/mra