

# Airwaves Scorecard

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



**May 1999**

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

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## PREFACE

This report is the fifth in the series of the Broadcast Monitoring Project being 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.

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 four television and two radio stations during the month of April 1999.

# 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.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This is the fifth 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 of the prosecution of the political transition programme. The report is based on the monitoring of selected broadcast media to assess their coverage of political issues during the period between April 1 and April 30, 1999.

This focuses on the coverage of political programmes by four 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 African Independent Television (AIT) in Lagos.
4. Privately-owned MiNAJ System 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

A full discussion of this can be found in the pilot report under this project published in January 1999 <sup>1</sup>. In that report, it was established that the basis of media monitoring and report on electoral exercises is founded on a variety of regional and international human rights instruments as well as the social obligation of the media. This ensures that citizens make informed choices whenever they participate in an electoral process.

That report also showed that guidelines may be issues for the media on the coverage of elections in order to maintain, public order, protect privacy or bar communications that would promote religious, racial or national hatred.

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

1. *See Airwaves Scorecard: Report of the Broadcast Media Coverage of the Political Transition Programme - January 1999.*

## **(b) FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND THE ELECTORAL PROCESS**

A fuller discourse on this issue can also be found in the pilot report under this project.<sup>2</sup> In that report the point was made that 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 view points are being fairly and equitably communicated so that the people may make informed choices.

Specifically, it was noted that, the prime place of television and radio as political mobilisation is incontestable. Television, with its visual effect, can create the most potent images and emotion. Radio is especially important in a country such as Nigeria. Where illiteracy is high, where newspapers do not circulate beyond major towns and where television is not widely available because of poor electricity supply 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.

## **(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.<sup>3</sup>

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.

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 a 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 parties; 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 that 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.”<sup>4</sup>

The second schedule to Decree No. 35 of 1998 contains guidelines of 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 broadcast should not exceed one hour per week per station, at pro-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 sake of airtime like jingles should not exceed 60 seconds and that no voice of a member of staff of the radio or television stations 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 Nigeria <sup>5</sup>. As part of these standards, it provides extensive guidelines for political coverage.<sup>6</sup> Besides the broad parameters

laid out in 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 the guidelines contained in it. These includes 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 of 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 Decree and electoral laws. All stations are obliged to adhere strictly to the rules 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 provide 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. Panellists 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 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, panellists 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.<sup>7</sup> 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 programming are being used

- b. The programmes are live or taped
- c. The programmes include “actually” - 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’s 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 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 BROADCAST MEDIA MONITORING**

As was the case with the previous reports under this project, there are two principal aspects that have been considered in this report. 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' action 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 rights 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 media for performing legitimate professional duties. In a nutshell, how the government acts to ensure the news media's right to gather and impart information and ideas.

These will be considered in terms of the General and Legal Environment.

(b) **The Broadcast Media**

Having regard to the objectives of this exercise as outlines above, and considering the fact that developments in the political arena have gone beyond electioneering politicking, and the role of the broadcast media in helping not just to ensure the enthronement but also the sustenance of democracy, considerations for monitoring the broadcast media have been slightly altered. The considerations for broadcast media monitoring for this report now include:

(a) How the broadcast media reports on allegations of electoral fraud and generates investigatives 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**

It is noted that a conducive general environment prevailed for the broadcast media during the month under review. The situation remained same as well the case in the months of December 1998 to March 1999. But the legal environment as noted in the January <sup>8</sup> report and reiterated to subsequent reports under this project was still filled with land mines. There has been no reprieve for the broadcast media may be considered laws for the shelve only, having been in existence for years without their being put to use, nothing has been done with respect to the provisions of Decree No. 35 of 1998 which greatly limits the performance of the broadcast media by its restriction on the airtime allocation that a political party may enjoy per week. A fuller discourse on this issue can be found in the March report.<sup>9</sup>

### **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**

Naturally, since the focus of this exercise is on daily broadcast monitoring and is on-going, there are obviously new developments to reports. However, the limitations set at the beginning of this exercise remain unchanged. Without prejudice to the aims and objectives set at the beginning of this exercise, the variables which hitherto formed the basis of the focus and analysis which were uttered in 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.

These variable are hereunder identified and defined.

#### **(a) Limitations**

The period to be covered by the entire project remains six months, from December 1998 to May 1999, with the transition programme is expected to have been completed. However, this report focuses on the monitoring of the broadcast media in the month of April 1999.

**(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 question 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 governance? 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 benchmark of democratic evolutions 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 station treat opposing views by opposition party(ies) and politician(s)?

#### **(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 MONITOR FOR THIS REPORT**

As noted in previous reports under this project, the coverage given by a particular radio / television station to the political transition programme as a whole and the various variables listed above, will sometimes 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 stations monitored were published in the February report.<sup>9</sup>

A reproduction of this is not considered necessary.

## **6. PRESENTATION OF RESULT OF THE BROADCAST MEDIA MONITORING FOR THE MONTH OF APRIL 1999.**

The month of April was not particularly a politically active one. Apart from the month of witnessing an election, and being four clear weeks to the hand-over date, the world's attention was focused on Nigeria because of the 10th World Youths Soccer Championship hosted by the country.

### **(i) Ray Power Radio, Lagos**

On April 1, Ray Power reported the visit of Chief Falae's lawyers to 16 states in the course of which the allegedly discovered eight million invalid votes for General Obasanjo, the presidential candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) declared by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), to have won the February 27 presidential election. Besides, the station highlighted the points of argument in the case. Specifically the issues of advertisement placements in newspapers on election day, General Obasanjo's alleged membership of Ogboni Confraternity, as well as the allegation of food distribution as a voter-inducement tool during the presidential election.

On April 16, the station informed listeners that Chief Falae's petition had been dismissed. It also aired the comments of the PDP vice president-elect. Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, who said that the "judgement is a victory for all Nigerians. We need a smooth and peaceful transition to civil democratic rule. We are very pleased with the judgement".

On April 8, the station reported General Obasanjo as saying that he would enact an anti-corruption law within 100 days in office. He also pledged to establish an anti-corruption agency to recover money stashed away in foreign bank accounts by unscrupulous Nigerians.

On April 9, '*Political Platform*' aired Chief Falae's comments on the tribunal's decision. He said: "The decision to go to court was a decision of the AD/APP alliance

which sponsored me for the presidential election. What happens next would also be a decision of the AD/APP alliance... we still all get together very soon and take a decision”.

Ray Power also reported the 3-day multi-party forum for governors-elect beginning on April 26, sponsored by the Agency for International Development and co-hosted by the three political parties. The forum, the station reported, provided an opportunity for the governors-elect to develop strategies for attaining political goals. The governors-elect were also reported to have been involved in a constructive dialogue about their collective role and responsibilities as elected officials.

The station reported that at the end of the forum on April 29, Lagos State Governor-elect, Senator Bola Tinubu, spoke for his colleagues. He was reported to have said the military could only be kept out of power through a strong commitment to the development of social amenities. The station also reported that a similar forum of good governance was held for legislators on April 28 by USAID at Gateway Hotel, Otta.

Further, issues regarding allegations of electoral fraud were treated in ‘*Factfile*’. Although the presenter did not venture any opinion, most callers on the programme thought that Chief Falae was right in his allegations and in instituting the court action. Some callers, however, felt it was all in bad taste.

## **(ii) MiNAJ System Television, Oboji**

Political news broadcast on the station started off on April 1 with stories on the President-elect, General Obasanjo’s good will tour around the world and a decision by the Federal Court of Appeal that it had no power to extend hearing of the petition filed by Chief Falae against the outcome of the presidential election.

News on the presidential election petition dominated the station’s bulletins between the April 2 and 5. On April 5, the station aired a news story that the Court ruled on the petition, dismissing it. In a vox-pop kind of interview, the station sought various opinions on the ruling. While some applauded the ruling, others disagreed with the court. The station also broadcast a news item to the effect that INEC had decided to appeal a Federal High Court’s ruling with regards to the governor-elect of Adamawa State.

On April 7, the station reported the return of General Obasanjo from his world tour. The activities of Anambra State Governor-elect, Dr. Chinwoke Mbadinuju were

highlighted in the broadcast of April 11.

Between that day and April 17, there was an increase in reports of political events. On April 18 and 19. There was a drop in the number of political stories in the station's news bulletins. From April 20 to 22 there was a dearth of political news items in the bulletins.

However, on April 23, there were three political news stories in the bulletin. They included an item of the striking-out of a petition challenging the election of Chief Mike Ajegbo as Senator for Anambra Central District and the proposed series of workshops on democratic principles for National and State legislators all over the country.

On April 27, the station broadcast an interview with the special assistant to the president-elect, Dr. Gbolade Osinowo, where the station sought to know why General Obasanjo did not first mend fences at home before embarking on a world tour. The station followed-up with interviews with members of the public on whether they thought Obasanjo could solve the myriad of problems the nation is facing. After viewers had given their opinions, the correspondents opted for a 'let's wait and see attitude' and did not interject his personal opinion.

The station reported on April 28, an appeal made by the Chief of General Staff, Vice Admiral Mike Akhigbe, to governor-elects to ensure the preservation of democratic tradition in the fourth republic. The bulletin also had three other political stories.

In its April 29 bulletin, the station had four political news items which included the advise given by the Head of State, General Abdulsalami Abubakar to the Armed Forces to allow politicians correct themselves whenever they make mistakes. Another news story was the resolution by participants at a nation-wide workshop on re-orientation of the Armed Forces and police that 28 years of military rule in Nigeria had neither benefited the military nor the civil populace.

On April 30, the bulletin had two political news stories in it.

### **(iii) Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Kaduna**

Political news broadcast began on NTA Kaduna on April 3 with a report of the inaugural sitting of the Kaduna State Election Petition Tribunal.

The station on April 5 reported the dismissal of the petition filed against the election

of General Olusegun Obasanjo, presidential candidate of the PDP, in February 27 presidential election, by his opponent, Chief Olu Falae, of the APP/AD alliance.

On April 23, the station reported a meeting held by the North-West Committee of PDP with use of actuality. It was given air time of about two minutes.

There were also two political news items on April 26, both stories relating to the roles of legislators in the on-coming civil rule.

There were also two political stories in the station's new bulletin of April 28.

#### **(iv) African Independent Television (AIT), Lagos.**

Political news broadcast on AIT started on April 1, when the station aired the visit of Chief Falae's lawyers to 16 states during which they allegedly discovered about eight million invalid votes for General Obasanjo.

On April 6, the station reported the dismissal of the petition against Obasanjo's election. This was done in great details and some lawyers for both parties were asked about their opinion of the judgement. An analysis of Falae's petition and its outcome was also aired on the '*Kaakaki*' a light-hearted morning magazine programme of same day.

On April 7, a presidential aspirant on the platform of one of the unregistered political parties, Movement for Democracy, Alhaji M. D. Yusuf, was guest on the programme. He supported Chief Falae's petition, saying that it was part of the process of democracy.

On April 11, the station's main news programme at 9.p.m. reported that APP and AD's joint decision to give effective check on the in-coming PDP government through the formation of a permanent alliance of both parties.

The proposed APP and AD alliance formed the attention of '*Kaakaki*' on April 12, when analysis of the issue was aired. The '*Kaakaki*' of April 20 featured the publisher of *The Examiner*, Mr. Pini Jason. He spoke on the issue of Chief Falae's refusal to congratulate General Obasanjo because he felt that he (Falae) won the February 27 presidential election. He advised politicians to learn to accept defeat.

The return of General Obasanjo from his world tour was on AIT's *News Searchlight* on April 24. The tour was described as more of a political rally going by the large number

of people waiting to see the arrival of the president-elect.

The station reported a 3-day multi-party forum for governors-elect in its news bulletin of April 26. On April 28, it reported that there was a seminar for legislators-elect.

**(v) Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Abuja**

The April news broadcast kicked off on April, with a report on the proceedings in the appeal filed by defeated AD/APP alliance presidential candidate, Chief Falae, against the outcome of the presidential election. The dismissal of the appeal also made the news bulletin on April 6.

News on gubernatorial and senatorial bye-elections in some states was relayed and the forum organised for legislators-elect was highlighted with much use of actuality and footage.

The world tour of President-elect, General Obasanjo, was given much publicity and a lot of issues relating to transparency in governance were relayed.

The series of meetings held between the Chief of Army Staff and various service combatants were included in the bulletins. Emphasis was placed on the decision of the military to return Nigeria to democratic rule.

Several reports on hand-over committees set-up by States Military Administrators also features in the news bulletins between April 16 to April 25.

The controversy over the zoning of the Senate presidency also got mentioned in the bulletins.

**(vi) Radio Nigeria (RN), Abuja**

The stations started its political news reports on April 2 when it aired reports of the submissions made by the lawyers in the appeal filed by the defeated AD/APP alliance presidential candidate, Chief Falae. Political coverage was almost non-existence between April 3 and 5. On April 6, the station reported that the appeal by Chief Falae had been dismissed by the court.

From April 11 to April 16, political stories were given minimal attention.

On April 19, the bulletin aired Rivers State Military Administrator Group Captain Sam Ewang's statement that tribalism, fraud and thuggery were some of the ills besetting

all attempts at entrenching democracy in the country.

From April 22 to 24, political news items were almost non-existence in the bulletins. The situation improved from April 25 till the end of the month.

The programme '*Platform*' which runs for 15 minutes, examined, in its April 26 edition, the issue of indiscipline in the polity and how best to tackle the problem. It focused on the inauguration of PDP's disciplinary committee.

The April 30 edition of '*Platform*' focused on the governors-elect forum and the role of women in the emerging democratic government.

## **7. ANALYSIS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **(a) ANALYSIS**

#### **(i) Ray Power Radio, Lagos**

The station during the month of April was relatively inactive on the political plane. The World Youth Soccer Championship tagged Nigeria '99, diverted media attention from political issues during the month under review. This became more noticeable from April 3 to April 24, which the championship lasted. It is in this light that a review of Ray Power's coverage of political issues during the month under focus is made.

During the first three days of the month, the station's reports on political issues were concentrated on the Electoral Tribunal's proceedings in the case instituted by Chief Falae against the President-elect, General Obasanjo, of the PDP. There were also reports on the Global Goodwill tour of the president-elect to 18 countries, the expectations of the electorate after the May 29 hand-over date.

The political/civic education programme, '*Factfile*', which used to set the agenda for political discourse every weekday, concentrated on other issues such as Women's Day, Operation Seep, etc. The News X-ray, which featured prominently on Ray Power between February and March, was off air during the month of April.

Other programmes including '*Your rights and Duties*', which usually features on Saturdays, '*Political Update*' and '*Political Platform*' either focused on non-political issues or did not feature at all.

Out of the 162 news items monitored on Ray Power during the month of April, only 17 were political news stories. Four out of the 17 political news items related to

allegations of electoral fraud, dealing with cases of petitions against the outcome of the presidential elections. Three news items dealt with transparency in government.

Eight other political stories were carried in the news bulletins monitored during the month, and they related largely to the tours by the president and vice-president-elect.

Others were on pronouncements made by the president-elect, the Lagos State governor-elect and other politicians.

While political news items were missing on some days, the news was not broadcast at all on some other days, especially on weekends.

#### **(ii) MiNAJ Systems Television, Obosi**

Like Ray Power, MiNAJ System Television recorded a marked decrease in political reporting during the month under review.

Out of the 198 news items aired by the television station during the month under review, 38 were on political events and stories.

Nine of the political news stories related to accountability in governance. Eleven reports related to post-election democratic development, fifteen were on other political issues while one was on loyal opposition and two on allegations of electoral fraud.

The station rested '*Political Diary*', the programme with which it hitherto educated its viewers on goings-on in the political area.

#### **(iii) Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Kaduna**

During the month under review, there were usually two main news broadcasts on NTA Kaduna daily. One news broadcast usually concentrated on local events happening within the State and the other, the National Networks News, which is broadcast by NTA national headquarters and relayed by all NTA Stations.

The State's local news tagged '*Periscope*' is broadcast in English at 7.00pm and is also translated in Hausa immediately after the English version. This is to take care of its non-English speaking viewers.

Out of the 119 news items broadcast by the station, 19 were on political events. Five related to accountability in governance. Eight reports related to post-election democratic development, while six were on other political issues.

While a few of the news were well reported, there were instances when no mention

was made of a major political development. One of such was the inaugural sitting of the Kaduna electoral petition tribunal on the Hausa version of the news.

Also, on April 12, the English version did not report the outcome of the suit filed by a defeated PDP Senatorial candidate in the State, Alhaji Musa Bello, but it was aired on the Hausa version for about one minute.

#### **(iv) African Independent Television (AIT), Lagos**

Political programmes on the African Independent Television (AIT) for the month of April was almost non-existent, as all the major programmes that dealt with politics and issues relating to it were off the air for the month. But the few political programmes the station aired during the month were professionally handled especially the interviews sessions on '*Kaakaki*'.

Relevant questions were asked and the analysis was handled quite professionally. The views of relevant members of APP, AD and PDP were sought on issues.

Proceedings of the court handling the petition filed by APP's defeated presidential candidate, Chief Falae, also, received maximum coverage by the AIT team, as they followed every step of the proceeding throughout the month of April with interviews of major parties involved in the suit.

#### **(v) Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Abuja**

Broadcast of political news and programmes on NTA Abuja for the month of April was scanty and came short of expectation. Issues relating to politics could rarely be heard or seen on the 9p.m. NTA network news and sometimes on the 7p.m. local news on the station.

Although the station aired some political stories during the month under review, this was insufficient. The April bulletin were dominated by the reports on the World Youth Soccer championship tagged: 'Nigeria' 99. Some programmes where political issues were discussed before now, dealt with other issues.

With the dismissal of the Falae's appeal, the station's political focus shifted to the activities of the incumbent government and those of the president-elect. The controversy on the zoning of the Senate presidency was mentioned in some of the bulletins but it was

not detailed.

The station's local news broadcast, focused mainly on happenings within Abuja with minimal attention given to local political events.

**(vi) Radio Nigeria (RN), Abuja**

The station broadcast four Network news of 30 minutes each everyday. These are at 7a.m, 4p.m., 7p.m. and 10p.m. 'Platform' an enlightenment magazine programme is broadcast of 15 minutes at 7.30p.m. on Mondays with a repeat broadcast on Thursdays at the same time. The 30 minutes broadcast of news four times daily for 30 days came to 60 hours during the month. 'Platform' which ran for 15 minutes per broadcast, was broadcast for a total of two hours for eight editions in the month of April. These would total 65 hours of broadcast of news and 'Platform'.

A 30-minutes news broadcast, which is standard for RN, would contain an average of eight items of news (i.e. about 4 minute per item). The 62 hours of news broadcast in April therefore, contained about 995 items of news (62 hours x 16 news items).

Of the 995 items of news, 47 items pertained to political events. This comes down to about 3 hours 8 minutes (47 items x 4 minute) of the 62 hours of news broadcast or **6.3%**. This is a lot less than the figures for March as reported in the April report under this project.

Of the 47 political news items, 17 were on transparency in governance, 14 related to post-election democratic development, while reports on loyal opposition was just one. Allegations of electoral fraud were two. Other political issues were 13.

During the month under review, the station missed out on about seven important political stories. They include Chief Falae's statement on arrival from England, the meeting between General Obasanjo and captains of industries at his Otta farm, and merger talks between the AD and APP. It also failed to report some sensitive statements/developments on the controversy over the zoning of the senate presidency to the South East, AD's call for a Government of National Unity, the training workshop for women and local government chairmen held in Jos and AD's conditions for joining an Obasanjo government.

The early days in April, however, witnessed political stories in the bulletins as

proceedings in Falae's suit were keenly followed by the crew.

Suffice it to say that the AD/APP merger story missed out, would have given viewers a clear signal to the character of the opposition expected in the next dispensation.

The April 30 edition of '*Platform*' focused on the governor-elect forum which provided common platform for the participants to share their experiences and plans of action for the next political dispensation.

## **(b) CONCLUSION**

During the month under review, there was a remarkable drop in the airtime and attention given to political stories by all the broadcast stations monitored following the same pattern of notice in the month of March as reported in the April under this project. All the stations, also discontinued with one programme or the other with which they had hitherto during the earlier part of the transition programme informed and educated listeners on the goings-on in the political arena.

A major reason for this drop in airtime allocation and attention to political stories by the broadcast stations monitored was the 10th World Youth Soccer Championship hosted by Nigeria during the month under review. Secondly, the conclusion of the court cases arising out of disputations of the presidential election result also serves to reduce media focus on politics during the month under review.

Nevertheless, Ray Power should be commended for airing the most important political news/issues as at when due, particularly the proceedings at the Election Petition Tribunal which sat through the Muslim and Easter Public Holiday periods. It is also to their credit that all areas/parties were covered without an overt display of partisanship.

For MiNAJ Systems Television, the month of April was quite uneventful regarding political broadcast. The station was inconsistent with its political news reports during the month under review. While it featured political news stories in its bulletins on some days, it would fail to do so for several days afterwards. Also, the station did not air any political education programme during the month under review having rested '*Political Dairy*' which hitherto served that purpose. As a result, there was no avenue to establish the station's position on unfolding political issues.

NTA kaduna's political broadcast was similarly uneventful as the number of political news items decreased, while there was no special political programme. The programme

'*Face the State*' that used to feature party candidates and officials, was off the air during the month under review. The only political broadcasts available to viewers of the station were on the news bulletin and they were quite scanty.

For AIT, although no reason was given for the absence of such political programmes as '*Issues in Democracy*' and '*Democracy Today*', it is considered not unconnected with the conclusion Chief Falae's petition and the football fiesta held in the country between April 3, to April 24.

The News department, however, did not totally fail to inform its viewers of what was happening on the political scene, especially the president-elect's world tour, the outcome of the suit on the presidential elections and other tribunals' proceedings. The station, however, deserves some commendation for its broadcast of important political news items and events although it feel short of expectations as it withdrew most of its political programmes during the month of April.

As for NTA Abuja with such programmes as "*Face the Nation*", that usually dealt with political issues, directing its attentions to other matters, its viewers only relied on the network news to get stories on political issues and events. Its sister radio station, Radio Nigeria, Abuja, was also quite disappointing. The rating of political news items on the station's news bulletins dropped drastically compared to the coverage in March. The station shifted its news focus from political news to sports stories.

### **(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 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.

\* In view of the greater advantage of the broadcast media 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 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.

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