

**ANALYSIS OF AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY RADIO  
PROGRAMMES IN EASTERN UGANDA :A CASE STUDY OF DELTA  
COMMUNITY RADIO SOROTI UGANDA**

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**UGANDA CHRISTIAN  
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**DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this work or any part thereof has not previously been submitted in any form to any University or to any other body whether for the purpose of assessment, publication or for any other purpose. Where information previously used has been captured in this report, it has fully been acknowledged and I can also confirm that the intellectual content of the work is the result of my own efforts and no other person.

Signature....  .... Date.....26/06/2024.....

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**APPROVAL**

This is to certify that this research was developed under my supervision.

Dr: Samuel Kazibwe.



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## **DEDICATION**

This work is lovingly dedicated to the resilient and vibrant communities of Eastern Uganda, whose voices and stories are the heartbeat of Delta Community Radio. It is through their active participation and unwavering spirit that the radio waves become a symphony of dialogue, learning, and empowerment.

To the dedicated staff and volunteers at Delta Radio, who are the pillars of this institution, ensuring that it remains a beacon of hope and a platform for change. Their commitment lights the way for a more engaged and informed community.

To my family, for their endless love and support, nurturing the passion and perseverance needed to undertake this journey. Their belief in my goals has been a constant source of strength and motivation.

And to all those who believe in the power of community media to transform societies—this is a tribute to your vision and efforts. May this study contribute to the flourishing of community radios everywhere as vital instruments for social change and development.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AP	Audience Participation
CEI	Community Engagement and Interaction
CE	Community Empowerment
UCC	Uganda Communications Commission
PC	Participatory Communication
CD	Community Development
CRP	Community Radio Program
APiCRP	Audience Participation in Community Radio Programs
DCR	Delta Community Radio
MCI	Media Content Improvement
SDI	Sustainable Development Initiatives
PPG	Policy & Practice Guidance
DI	Digital Inclusion
NRM	National Resistance Movement
DPT	Democratic Participant Theory
CR	Community Radio
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences

## **ABSTRACT**

This research examines the dynamics of audience participation at Delta Community Radio in Soroti, Uganda, highlighting its critical role and the challenges it faces in fostering community engagement through broadcasting. As a significant component of Uganda's media landscape, community radio stations like Delta Community Radio are pivotal in providing a platform for participatory communication, particularly in regions underserved by mainstream media.

This study utilizes qualitative methods, drawing insights from interviews and focus groups to offer a comprehensive understanding of how community radio influences local engagement and development.

The research objectives were to assess the existing levels of audience participation, identify the barriers that prevent deeper community involvement, and develop strategies that could enhance interaction between the radio station and its listeners. The findings reveal that while the radio station enjoys a broad listenership due to its focus on local content in native languages, there are significant challenges that limit effective audience participation. These include limited On-Air time, Biased and Limited Programming Content as well as economic challenges (household poverty).

Moreover, the study explores the implications of these findings for the effectiveness of community radio in promoting development and democracy. It is evident that enhancing participatory communication can lead to improved community empowerment and socio-economic development. Thus, strategic recommendations

are offered to address the identified barriers, including the adoption of more inclusive programming, the enhancement of digital platforms, and initiatives to reduce economic impediments to participation.

Overall, this research contributes to the understanding of the unique role of community radio in rural development, offering a template for other stations in similar settings to improve their engagement strategies and impact. The study's outcomes are intended to inform policy-making and practical implementations in media practices, ensuring that community radios can continue to serve as vital tools for development and community empowerment in Uganda and beyond.

## CHAPTER ONE

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

#### **1.0 Introduction**

Community radio serves as a pivotal medium in the fabric of Uganda's communication landscape especially in rural and semi-urban settings where mainstream media's reach is often limited. Delta Community Radio located in Soroti District stands as a testament to the power of local broadcasting aiming to bridge the gap between the community's needs and the broader developmental agenda. This research seeks to unravel the dynamics of audience participation within Delta Community Radio's programming.

Community radio stations are more than mere channels of information; they are forums for community engagement and empowerment. They play critical roles in addressing local issues from health and education to governance and women's rights thus directly impacting community development and participation (Nabulya, 2022). In Uganda, where radio remains the most widespread and accessible form of media, understanding how audiences interact with their local stations provides crucial insights into the effectiveness of these media in promoting participatory development (Mukasa, 2021).

The significance of community radio in Eastern Uganda is underscored by its ability to offer programs in local languages and contexts, making it an invaluable tool for community education and mobilization (Kisembo et al., 2023). However, despite its potential, there is a notable gap in active audience engagement, with many listeners remaining passive consumers rather than active participants (Semujju, 2019). This study focuses on Delta Community Radio as a case study to assess the extent and

nature of audience participation, exploring the mechanisms through which the station fosters such engagement and the barriers it faces in this endeavor.

By employing a Qualitative approach, this research will qualify the ways in which Delta Community Radio engages its audience and the impact of such engagement on community development. The findings aim to offer actionable insights that could enhance the station's programming and operational strategies, ultimately fostering a more engaged and informed listener base (Ocitti, 2018).

This study is not only timely but also essential in an era where information is a key driver of socio-economic development. It aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on community media participation, providing a blueprint for other community radio stations in Uganda and beyond on leveraging audience engagement for societal benefit (Tumwebaze and Mwesige, 2024).

## **1.1 Background of Study**

### **1.1.1 Historical Background**

The inception of radio in Uganda can be traced back to 1953, established by the British colonial administration. Initially devised as a tool for entertainment and the dissemination of colonial policies, radio has evolved significantly over the decades to become a vital part of Uganda's social and political landscape. Post-independence, radio transitioned from a colonial instrument to a state-controlled medium, primarily used for propagating government narratives (Chibita, 2010). The transformative era for Uganda's media landscape began in the late 1980s, following the political ascendancy of the National Resistance Movement (NRM). This period marked the liberalization of the media sector, paving the way for the proliferation

of private media outlets, including radio stations (Ocitti, 2018). By 2018, the landscape had further diversified with the licensing of 292 FM stations, signifying a dynamic shift towards more pluralistic media offerings (UCC, 2018).

The establishment of community radios emerged as a response to the demand for more localized and participatory forms of media. Community radios like Delta Radio in Soroti are distinguished by their focus on local content, broadcasting in native languages, and facilitating community involvement. Delta Radio, launched by the Soroti Catholic Diocese in 2006, epitomizes the evolution and localization of broadcast media by focusing on developmental themes pertinent to the Teso sub-region, addressing specific needs such as education, health, and local governance (UCC, 2018). This historical shift from centralized, government-dominated broadcasting to more decentralized and community-focused radio stations has significantly altered how information is disseminated and consumed.

Community radios have become instrumental in engaging local populations by providing a platform for dialogue and participation, essential for democratic governance and community development (Semujju, 2013). The evolution of radio in Uganda, particularly the growth of community radio stations, reflects broader trends in media democratization and localization. This historical context provides a crucial backdrop for analyzing audience participation in community radio programs, particularly in a regionally focused station like Delta Radio, which plays a pivotal role in shaping local discourse and development (Mukasa, 2021).



### **1.1.2 Theoretical Background**

The study of audience participation in community radio programming, particularly within the context of Delta Community Radio in Soroti, Uganda, is underpinned by the Democratic-participant theory of mass communication. This theory, as proposed by Coronel (2001), emphasizes that a thriving democracy is contingent upon the active involvement of all citizens. In media terms, this involves the engagement of the populace in governance processes through the dissemination of information, education, and the mobilization of the public.

Community radio stations are the epitome of this theoretical framework, serving as platforms that foster grassroots democracy. Unlike commercial or state-controlled media, which often perceive listeners merely as passive recipients of information, community radio regards its audience as active participants whose voices and opinions are integral to the broadcast content. This participatory model promotes inclusivity and responsiveness to local needs, making it a critical element of democratic engagement in media practice (Kisembo, T., et al. (2023)). The relevance of the Democratic-participant theory is particularly pronounced in the context of community radios like Delta Radio, which not only aim to inform but also to involve the community in content creation and station management. This approach aligns with Howley's (2005) view that community media should be non-hierarchical and participatory, where decisions, including those about editorial content, are made collectively by the community. Further supporting this theoretical approach, Bessette (2004) argues that participatory development communication through media like community radio is a potent tool for facilitating human development. By encouraging active participation in development projects, community radio can

mobilize communities to support initiatives that enhance their well-being. In the specific case of Delta Community Radio, the application of this theory allows for an exploration of how the radio station facilitates community participation and how it impacts the listeners' ability to influence programming based on their needs and preferences. This theoretical backdrop is crucial for understanding the dynamics between the radio station and its audience and for assessing how effectively the station fulfills its role as a facilitator of community development and empowerment.

### **1.1.3 Contextual Background**

Delta Community Radio, stationed in Soroti Municipality, embodies a critical nexus of local broadcasting and community engagement in Eastern Uganda. With its inception in 2006 by the Soroti Catholic Diocese, Delta Radio was established with a mission to serve the pastoral and socio-economic development needs of communities within the Teso sub-region. This radio station uniquely caters to the Kumam and Bakenyi tribes, broadcasting primarily in the languages of Kumam, Ateso, and Lukenyi, which is pivotal for inclusivity and cultural preservation (UCC, 2018). Geographically positioned approximately 300 km from Kampala, Delta Radio's strategic location enables it to cover more than ten districts across Eastern Uganda. Its signal strength allows it to reach a vast audience spanning Soroti, Serere, Katakwi, and beyond, which according to the IPSOS media survey (2019), makes it the sole community radio station with such extensive reach in the region. This extensive coverage is crucial as it places Delta Radio at the forefront of addressing the diverse needs of its listeners, ranging from education and health awareness to agricultural development and disaster preparedness. The role of community radio in fostering participatory communication is significant in regions like Eastern Uganda,

where radio remains the most accessible form of media. Delta Radio, therefore, not only provides a platform for information dissemination but also acts as a space for community voices to be heard and involved in discussions that affect their daily lives and future. (Semujju, B. 2023). The unique position of Delta Radio in Eastern Uganda's media landscape is underlined by its commitment to development-oriented programming. This approach is instrumental in mobilizing community support for local initiatives and providing a feedback mechanism for the community to influence content and programming, ensuring the radio station remains by and for the people (Mukasa, S. 2021). This contextual backdrop is essential for understanding the dynamics of audience participation in community radio programming at Delta Radio. It highlights the station's potential impact on local development and its capacity as a tool for empowerment and social change within Eastern Uganda's diverse socio-cultural landscape.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Community radios serve as critical information diffusion platforms utilized by non-governmental organizations, women's organizations, civic groups, and governments to disseminate developmental information in various domains such as health, education, and agriculture to the community (Fraser & Estrada, 1998; Mhagama, 2016; Milan, 2009; Nirmala, 2015). These radio stations play a vital role in creating awareness, providing information and education, enhancing community skills, and fostering cultural, political, and economic development and empowerment (Nirmala, 2015).

A report by the BBC in 2019 on the media landscape of Uganda found that radio is the most popular communication medium in the country, with 78% of individuals reporting that they listen to the radio (BBC Media Action, 2019). This high level of radio listenership is corroborated by the National Information Technology Survey, which indicates that radio listenership stands at 80% in urban areas and 76% in rural areas (National IT Survey Uganda, 2019). Despite this widespread listenership, audience participation levels such as membership in listeners' clubs and participation in call-in shows remain notably low, with only 37% of the population engaging in these interactive activities (Fielder & Meyen, 2019).

This study, therefore, aims to investigate the underlying reasons for the low levels of audience participation in community radio programs in Uganda. Furthermore, this research will explore strategies through which community radios can be leveraged to enhance information access, thereby empowering rural communities towards sustainable livelihoods.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

#### **1.3.1 Major Objective**

To assess audience participation in Community Radio Programs (CRPs) in order to implement effective strategies that aim to enhance community engagement and interaction at Delta Radio, Soroti, Uganda.

#### **1.3.2 Specific Objectives**

1. To examine the nature of participation of audiences in community radio programs.

2. To explore the current barriers to audience engagement in community radio programs.
3. To propose solutions for the identified barriers to audience participation in community radio programs.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. What is the nature of participation of audiences in community radio programs?
2. What are the hindrances to audience participation in community radio programs?
3. What are the solutions to the hinderances to audience participation in community radio programs?

#### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

##### **1.5.1 Geographical Scope**

The research was carried out in Soroti District with major focus was put on the sub counties within the municipality. This location has been chosen because it contains most of the areas served by the selected community radio in the study.

##### **1.5.2 Time Scope**

The study examined information regarding audience participation in Delta Community Radio programs between 2013 and 2021. This timeframe was selected because it marks the period when the community radio shifted from commercial programming to developing more community-focused programs.

### **1.5.3 Content Scope**

This study delves into the arena of community radio programming in Eastern Uganda, with a particular focus on audience participation dynamics within the context of Delta Community Radio in Soroti District. Through a comprehensive analysis, the research aims to elucidate the patterns, motivations, and challenges associated with audience engagement in radio programs. Key areas of exploration include the influence of socio-cultural factors on audience interaction, the effectiveness of participatory programming strategies, and the impact of audience feedback on program development.

### **1.6 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study transcends several critical areas of social and communication sciences, promising substantial contributions to both theory and practice. It shows this in these ways; It emphasizes empowering local communities to actively shape media content, promoting democratic participation and addressing specific local issues effectively (Mukasa, 2021). The study also aims to enhance the relevance and engagement of media content, ensuring that community radio remains a vital tool for cultural preservation and education (Semujju, 2023). By optimizing community radio platforms, the study supports sustainable development initiatives, facilitating effective dissemination of crucial developmental information (Ocitti, 2018). It also aims to enrich academic discussions on media participation, offering valuable empirical data from a less-studied region, aiding future research and policy-making (Kisembo et al., 2023). Furthermore, the findings will guide policymakers and practitioners in enhancing listener engagement, crucial for media pluralism and community development (Nabulya, 2022).

## 1.7 Justification of the Study

The proposed study is justified by several critical considerations that underscore its necessity and potential impact. It addresses the significant lack of empirical data on audience engagement with community radios in Eastern Uganda, enriching the field with vital localized insights (Semujju, 2023).

By understanding how audiences interact with community radio, the study aims to improve the relevance and effectiveness of these platforms and thus enhance community engagement in promoting local development and cultural expression (Ocitti, 2018). The research evaluates the inclusivity of community radio, aiming to bolster its role as a platform for democratic participation and public discourse (Nabulya, 2022). Findings will guide media practitioners and policymakers in enhancing interactive and participatory communication strategies, thereby potentially increasing the overall impact of community radios in societal development (Mukasa, 2021). While the study focuses on a specific Ugandan context, its findings will contribute to global discussions on community media and participatory communication, offering insights applicable in similar settings worldwide (Kisembo et al., 2023).

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

The engagement of audiences in community radio programming is a vital element that influences the efficacy and impact of such media outlets on local development. This chapter explores existing research related to the themes of audience participation, barriers to engagement, and the development of strategies to enhance interaction within community radio settings, particularly focusing on Delta Community Radio in Soroti, Uganda. The chapter will account for the literature review in consideration of all study objectives that the research aims to make conclusions about. The chapter will further discuss the objectives of the study in relation to the highlights of the conceptual framework, especially for the independent variable, the dependent variable, and the other intervening variables.

#### **2.1 Theoretical Review**

Theory plays a pivotal role in research by describing and explaining processes, providing models that capture the essential features of real-world situations. The primary aim of the theoretical framework is to render research findings more meaningful and acceptable, facilitating their generalizability. This study adopts the Democratic-Participant Theory.

##### **2.1.1 Democratic-Participant Theory**

The Democratic-Participant Theory is a modification of the social responsibility theory. Baran and Davis (2012) infer that this theory advocates for media support for cultural pluralism at the grassroots level. Media is particularly important in rural



settings and in cultures that are eroding over time. The theory is believed to conserve and revive local cultures by promoting the right to information (both global and local), the right to express (feedback), the right to use new technologies (means of communication), freedom to local data, and freedom to engage in social action (Bajracharya, 2018).

The theory emphasizes the roles of media at the community level, including the dissemination of local information, gathering feedback, and promoting social action. It discourages uniform, monopolized, and commercialized media culture, advocating instead for local, non-institutionalized media to provide information relevant to small population groups (Baran & Davis, 2012). Bajracharya (2018) notes that this theory fosters interaction between media and audiences, which is more feasible in smaller groups and communities.

The model is non-political and does not support political control, focusing instead on national development, cultural support, and maintaining good relationships with other countries. Baran and Davis (2012) also assert that the theory promotes equality across various genders, classes, castes, and races, driven by the community. This focus on equality is termed the "association mode," which contrasts with the "command mode" where the sender is superior to the receiver. This theory is relevant to the study as it underpins the analysis of audience participation in community radio programs in Uganda's eastern region, highlighting media-audience interaction at the grassroots level.

### **2.1.2 Examples and Application of Democratic-Participant Theory**

According to Okorie, Oyedepo, and Usaini (2012), the Democratic-Participant Theory is exemplified in community newspapers, community radios, and televisions. Other

examples include social action through social media and language programs via phone apps, as well as underground and alternative press (Bajracharya, 2018). The theory is utilized in Western Europe, evident in the cultural and ethnic revival through media. Countries such as Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Ghana, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, the US, and the UK have adopted this theory in their mass media (Okorie, Oyedepo & Usaini, 2012; Baran & Davis, 2012). The theory proposes that media should propagate, support, and promote the views and opinions of individuals concerning governance, leadership, and stewardship in public administration. It emphasizes the need for equal and unhindered access regardless of status, wealth, or position (Baran & Davis, 2012). Participation in societal decision-making and communication activities should not be the exclusive domain of the wealthy but should be accessible to all citizens (Bajracharya, 2018).

## **2.2 Conceptualization of Community Radio**

Understanding community radio necessitates a conceptualization of community media in general. Community media includes radio, television, print, and computer networks. Regardless of the medium, community media share common characteristics. Howley (2005) describes community media as grassroots or locally oriented media access initiatives driven by a profound dissatisfaction with mainstream media forms. Githaiga (2011) notes that community radio serves those whose interests are often overlooked by mainstream media. Community radio stations are defined as “small-scale, decentralized broadcasting initiatives that are easily accessed by local people, actively encourage their participation in programming, and include some element of community ownership or membership” (Myers, 2011). This definition emphasizes listener involvement and participation in

radio station activities. Fraser & Estrada (2001) further define community broadcasting as a non-profit service owned and managed by a particular community, typically through a trust, foundation, or association. Community broadcasting aims to serve a specific community rather than the entire nation and relies primarily on community resources (Fraser & Estrada, 2001). According to Alumuku (2006), community radio aspires to improve living standards and find solutions to local problems. These stations employ a participatory approach to decision-making, enabling the voiceless to define their own development paths by identifying and implementing community-initiated projects (Mhagama, 2016).

Community radio stations can achieve their developmental objectives if their programs are well-researched, produced, and presented in comprehensible languages, with listeners playing a central role in the entire programming process (Jallov, 2012). Thus, community radio promotes knowledge sharing, helping audiences make informed choices on critical issues. Jallov (2012) asserts that listeners understand messages more easily and take pride when local languages are used. Gaynor and O'Brien (2011) state that community radio is expected to focus on education, health, environment, agriculture, and rural and community development. These issues are vital as they contribute to the social, economic, and overall development of rural communities. Banda (2003) believes that well-managed community radio can fill the void left by national media, both public and commercial.

### **2.3 The Nature of Participatory Media**

Bessette (2004) describes participatory communication as a process where all participants have equal access to express their viewpoints, feelings, and experiences.

Participatory development requires efforts to involve everyone, implying public involvement in the production and management of communication systems (Pratt, 2009). Keeping the public in touch with producers, administrators, and managers of communication organizations encourages ordinary people's participation in the media (Pratt, 2009).

According to Pratt (2009), audiences must get directly involved in issues that affect their lives and those around them, ensuring that everyone's needs are equally met. Rodriguez and Amparo (2007) argue that participatory media projects encourage individuals and groups to recognize their capacity to intervene and redefine power relations within and sometimes beyond local communities. Rather than viewing audiences as deficient in effecting social change, participatory methods enable communities to reassert and reclaim their capacity to transform their daily lives (Howley, 2005).

Engaging audiences in the communication process empowers them, reassuring them that their views and opinions matter and contribute significantly to the social, economic, and political development of their communities (Rodriguez and Amparo, 2007). Participation manifests in various forms, leading to different definitions by scholars. Carpentier (2011) classifies ordinary people's involvement in media into two interrelated forms: participation in the media and participation through the media. Participation in the media involves the production of media content and organizational decision-making (content-related and structural participation).

Participation through the media offers opportunities for mediated participation in public debate and self-representation in public spaces (Carpentier, 2011). Fairchild (2010) highlights that community radio's role is to facilitate two-way communication within the local community, involving ordinary people providing feedback.

Berrigan (1979) argues that when people offer feedback, they engage in public discourse, supporting popular participation in decision-making processes and promoting a sense of individual and collective agency in directing community growth and development (cited in Fairchild, 2010). Berrigan (1979) emphasizes that participation should begin at the problem definition stage, involving community members early in the establishment of a radio station and deciding on the program content. However, it is often assumed that ordinary people are not offered a chance to contribute to programming during the initial formation of some community radio stations.

At Delta Radio, audience participation manifests in several conventional and digital forms, indicative of the evolving landscape of community media interaction. Traditional forms of engagement include live call-ins during radio shows, which remain a popular method for instant public interaction. This direct form of participation allows listeners to voice opinions, ask questions, and contribute to discussions in real-time, fostering a sense of community and immediacy (Nabulya, 2022). Text messaging and social media platforms represent the digital expansion of audience engagement avenues. These tools have become increasingly vital in facilitating broader participation due to their convenience and accessibility. Delta Radio leverages these platforms for feedback, polls, and listener-generated content,

which broadens the scope of interaction beyond those able to call during live broadcasts (Kisembo et al., 2023). Additionally, community outreach events and participatory programming initiatives are significant. These events often include interactive sessions where community members can engage with the radio team face-to-face, thus deepening their connection to the station and its mission (Mukasa, 2021).

The level of participation at Delta Radio varies widely, influenced by program content, the time of broadcast, and the demographic targeted. Programs focusing on local governance and health care see higher engagement levels, likely due to their direct impact on listeners' lives. Educational and developmental programs, especially those involving community experts or local celebrities, also tend to draw significant listener interaction, highlighting the community's interest in growth and learning opportunities (Ocitti, 2018). Despite these engagements, there remains a notable segment of the audience that remains passive, often due to barriers such as literacy levels, access to technology, or cultural norms that may discourage public participation, especially among women and marginalized groups (Semujju, 2019).

## **2.4 Determinants of Audience Participation**

### **2.4.1 Participatory Communication Strategies**

Participatory communication strategies are pivotal in enhancing audience participation at Delta Community Radio, Soroti, Uganda. Let us delve into the methods and practices that have proven effective in fostering greater listener engagement and interaction, aligning with the objective to boost community involvement through the medium of radio.

### **Engagement Through Localized Content**

Creating programs that reflect the interests, languages, and issues pertinent to the local community is a foundational strategy in participatory communication. Delta Radio can increase audience participation by involving local figures in program production, discussing local events, and addressing community-specific challenges. This approach not only garners higher listener engagement but also strengthens the relevance of the radio as a community resource (Nabulya, 2022).

### **Interactive Programming**

Interactive programming is a dynamic strategy that incorporates live interactions such as call-ins, real-time SMS responses, and interactive polls during broadcasts. This direct engagement empowers listeners to voice their opinions and contribute to the radio content, making the programming more responsive and adaptive to audience needs (Kisembo et al., 2023).

### **Digital Engagement Platforms**

With the advent of digital technology, utilizing online platforms for participation has become increasingly important. Delta Radio can enhance its participatory communication by leveraging social media, mobile apps, and streaming services to facilitate easier and more accessible listener interaction. These platforms can extend the radio's reach and provide additional channels for feedback and engagement, crucial for younger demographics (Ocitti, 2018).

### **Community Forums and Workshops**

Organizing community forums and workshops can significantly enhance participatory communication by providing a physical space for dialogue and learning. These events allow for direct interaction between the radio staff and the community, fostering a deeper connection and understanding of the audience's needs and preferences. Workshops on media literacy and communication skills also empower listeners to effectively engage with the station and its programming (Mukasa, 2021).

### **Feedback Mechanisms**

Implementing robust feedback mechanisms is essential for assessing the effectiveness of participatory strategies and making necessary adjustments. Regular surveys, listener feedback segments, and open forums for critique and suggestions ensure that the station remains attuned to the needs and desires of its audience. This ongoing feedback loop is vital for continuous improvement and sustainability of engagement efforts (Semujju, 2019).

#### **2.4.2 Community Development Initiatives**

Community development initiatives are central to enhancing audience participation at Delta Community Radio in Soroti, Uganda. These initiatives leverage the radio's platform to foster significant engagement and address local developmental challenges through participatory communication. Let us explore how integrating community development initiatives into programming can serve as a determinant of audience participation, enhancing the station's role in promoting community well-being and socio-economic development.

### **Health and Education Programs**



Delta Radio can impact significantly through health and educational programming that addresses local needs and concerns. Initiatives such as health awareness campaigns, educational broadcasts on agriculture practices, and literacy improvement efforts directly contribute to community upliftment. Programs tailored to local health issues, like malaria prevention or maternal health, are particularly effective in engaging listeners who are directly affected by these issues, encouraging them to participate more actively in discussions and follow-ups (Kisembo et al., 2023).

### **Economic Empowerment Projects**

Radio programs that focus on economic empowerment, such as skills development, entrepreneurial training, and financial literacy, are essential for stimulating local economic growth and participation. By broadcasting success stories, providing a platform for local entrepreneurs to share experiences, and offering guidance on accessing financial services, the station can play a pivotal role in driving economic activity and encouraging listener engagement (Nabulya, 2022).

### **Civic Engagement and Governance**

Encouraging civic participation through programs that discuss local governance issues, rights, and responsibilities under the law can enhance political awareness and mobilization. Delta Radio's involvement in airing debates, providing a platform for community leaders to speak, and facilitating listener feedback on governance issues fosters a more informed and engaged populace. This type of programming helps break down barriers to participation by empowering listeners to voice concerns and interact with local authorities (Mukasa, 2021).

## **Environmental Conservation Initiatives**

Programs focused on environmental conservation and sustainable practices can resonate deeply within communities affected by climate change and land degradation. Delta Radio can facilitate community-led environmental initiatives, discuss the impacts of environmental changes, and promote sustainable practices through educational content. These programs not only engage listeners but also promote community-led solutions to environmental challenges (Ocitti, 2018).

## **Cultural Preservation and Promotion**

Community radios like Delta can play a crucial role in preserving and promoting local cultures and languages. Programs that celebrate local heritage, traditional music, and arts not only boost community pride and cohesion but also increase participation as they reflect the community's identity and values. Such content encourages audience engagement by fostering a sense of belonging and pride (Semujju, 2019).

### **2.4.3 Digital Inclusion**

Digital inclusion is increasingly recognized as a crucial factor in enhancing audience participation in community radio, particularly at Delta Community Radio in Soroti, Uganda. Let us explore how integrating digital technologies into radio programming can break down barriers to participation and foster a more engaged listener base.

## **Broadening Access Through Digital Platforms**

Delta Radio can significantly increase audience engagement by leveraging digital platforms. This includes the use of social media, mobile applications, and internet streaming to reach a wider audience, particularly the youth and those living outside the traditional broadcast range. These platforms allow for real-time interaction and feedback during broadcasts, making participation more accessible and convenient (Ocitti, 2018).

### **Interactive and Multi-platform Engagement**

The use of digital tools enables the station to offer interactive content that can be accessed on multiple devices. This includes podcasts, live streaming services, and interactive SMS platforms that allow listeners to participate in discussions, vote on issues, or send feedback directly from their smartphones or computers. Such multi-platform engagement ensures continuous interaction with the community, even outside the traditional radio broadcast schedule (Kisembo et al., 2023).

### **Enhancing Educational Outreach**

Digital inclusion also extends to educational programming, where Delta Radio can utilize online tools to disseminate educational materials and conduct webinars or online workshops. This approach not only increases the reach of educational initiatives but also enables tracking of participation rates and feedback, providing valuable data for improving program content and delivery (Mukasa, 2021).

### **Overcoming Geographical Barriers**

For listeners in remote or underserved areas, digital technologies such as mobile internet and satellite communications provide an opportunity to participate in

community dialogues. Delta Radio can exploit these technologies to ensure that geographical barriers do not hinder community members from engaging with the radio's content, thus promoting inclusivity and equal participation (Nabulya, 2022).

### **Challenges and Strategies for Digital Inclusion**

While digital inclusion has many benefits, challenges such as digital literacy, infrastructure limitations, and affordability must be addressed. Delta Radio can collaborate with local NGOs and government agencies to provide digital literacy training and advocate for better internet infrastructure. Additionally, offering content that is optimized for low-bandwidth environments can ensure broader access despite connectivity issues (Semujju, 2019).

### **2.5 Community Media in the Digital Age: Expanding Participation**

Gilberds and Myers (2012) argue that the convergence of new digital technologies with radio enhances the ability of ICTs to contribute to development outcomes by facilitating two-way knowledge flows. Integrating ICTs, such as mobile phones, into community radio practice expands participation opportunities. In many developing countries, more people use mobile phones than fixed-line telephones (Goggin and Clark, 2009). ICTs play a crucial role in participatory communication in community media by enabling two-way communication between producers and audiences. Community radios in Uganda increasingly embrace new ICTs (UNESCO, 2011; Dralega, 2009; Mijumbi, 2012). ICTs have revolutionized media operations, offering real-time information transfer, flexibility, capacity development, and the ability to operate anywhere, rural or urban (Semujju, 2013; Dralega, 2009). The greatest potential of technological advancement lies in enhancing feedback mechanisms in broadcasting,

promoting community dialogue (UNESCO, 2011). The internet provides a platform for communities to search for information on agriculture, health, and farming, sharing this knowledge through media platforms (Nassanga, Manyozo, & Lopes, 2013). ICTs enable the audience to access and share information with the media, facilitating informed decision-making (Isaksen, 2012). Using SMS, WhatsApp group chats, and Facebook, communities can send responses to radio stations live on air, ensuring their opinions and participation are acknowledged (Dralega, 2009).

## **2.6 Gaps in the Current Literature**

Despite extensive research on community radio and audience participation, several critical gaps remain unaddressed, particularly in the context of Eastern Uganda. These gaps highlight the need for further investigation to enhance the effectiveness and inclusivity of community radio stations like Delta Community Radio. While some studies acknowledge the role of technology in community radio, there is insufficient exploration of specific technological barriers that listeners face, such as unreliable internet connectivity and lack of access to digital devices. This gap is crucial, especially given the increasing reliance on digital platforms for audience engagement (Mukasa, 2021; Ocitti, 2018). The existing literature often overlooks the socio-economic factors that limit audience participation, such as the high cost of communication and economic disparities. There is a need for a more detailed analysis of how these constraints affect listener engagement and what strategies can be implemented to mitigate these barriers (Nabulya, 2022; Kitembo et al., 2023). Although cultural and gender norms are recognized as significant factors influencing audience participation, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that delve into how these norms specifically impact different demographic groups within

the community. More nuanced research is required to understand the dynamics of cultural and gender-based barriers to participation (Semujju, 2019; Financial Sector Deepening Uganda, 2019). The literature often mentions digital inclusion but does not provide a thorough analysis of how digital tools can be effectively integrated into community radio programming to enhance participation. There is a need for empirical studies that evaluate the impact of digital strategies on audience engagement and propose practical solutions for digital inclusion (Ocitti, 2018; United Nations Capital Development Fund, 2021). There is a paucity of research on the implementation and effectiveness of feedback mechanisms in community radio. Studies rarely address how continuous feedback loops can be established and maintained to ensure that programming remains relevant and responsive to community needs (Kisembo et al., 2023; Semujju, 2019). Existing research tends to gloss over the impact of political and regulatory environments on audience participation. There is a need for more focused studies that explore how regulatory frameworks and political contexts influence the operation and audience engagement of community radio stations (Bank of Uganda, 2020; Scholtens & Wensveen, 2003).

## **2.7 Summary of Reviewed Literature**

The comprehensive literature review on audience participation at Delta Community Radio in Soroti, Uganda, explores the multifaceted aspects of listener engagement and identifies strategic methods to enhance community interaction within the broadcast content. The review elucidates the significant role of participatory communication strategies and underscores the importance of integrating localized content and interactive programming to maximize audience engagement. Such engagement is particularly effective when programming mirrors the listeners'

experiences and addresses their needs. Community development initiatives within the programming - such as health, education, and economic empowerment segments—have been shown to stimulate audience participation significantly. These segments not only engage listeners but also contribute directly to their socio-economic development. Additionally, cultural programming enhances community cohesion by aligning closely with listeners' identities and local heritage, while environmental content engages communities around shared concerns. Digital inclusion emerges as a crucial theme, illustrating how digital platforms can bridge gaps in participation among youth and remote listeners. These tools help overcome geographic and socio-economic barriers, although challenges such as digital literacy and infrastructure deficiencies remain. Addressing these challenges is vital for leveraging digital tools effectively. The literature also highlights barriers to participation, including technological, economic, and socio-cultural obstacles, which impede the inclusivity and effectiveness of community radio interactions. Overcoming these barriers is essential to ensure equitable access to the radio's resources and opportunities for community engagement.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted for the research on audience participation in community radio programs, specifically focusing on Delta Community Radio in Soroti, Uganda. Utilizing the research onion model developed by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2022), which provides a systematic approach to the design of our research through layers, starting from the core and working outwards to cover philosophy, approaches, strategies, choices, time horizons, and techniques.

#### **3.1 Research Approach**

This study adopted a qualitative research method, which involves the collection and analysis of non-numerical data such as text, perceptions, and experiences (Edwards & Holland, 2013). The qualitative approach primarily involves gathering data in the form of words, pictures, descriptions, narratives, or narrations. This method was chosen due to its suitability for examining research problems that require an exploration of contextual understandings, multi-level perspectives, and cultural influences (Burch & Heinrich, 2016), all of which are critical to this study. Qualitative description provides a "rich, straight description" of the data, offering a comprehensive view rather than a highly interpretive one (Neergaard et al., 2009). This method proved invaluable in analyzing the different experiences and perceptions of people regarding the effectiveness of community radios and their participation in community radio programs.



### **3.2 Research Design**

This study utilized a one-shot design. This design was selected because it narrows a broad field of research into one or a few easily researchable examples. It is particularly useful for testing whether specific theories and models apply to real-world phenomena, especially when little is known about them (Aliyu et al., 2014). This is pertinent in examining community participation in community radio programs at Delta Community Radio in Eastern Uganda. The case study design allows for a detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships. This approach enabled a deeper understanding of the informants' and discussants' views and opinions. Additionally, it offered a higher level of flexibility and presented a more realistic view of the social world, achieved through interviews and focus group discussions (Yin, 2003).

#### **3.2.1 Study Population**

The study population comprises the entire group of individuals, objects, items, cases, articles, or things with common characteristics existing in space at a particular point in time within the research study (Alshenqeeti, 2014). This study included Delta Community Radio programmers, farmers, the business community, women, and youth in Soroti Municipality. These demographic groups were selected based on their significant involvement in community radio participation (BBC, 2019).

#### **3.2.2 Sampling Design**

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to collect in-depth data from a select group of "information-rich" individuals. This approach prioritizes detailed insights and understandings over quantitative generalizations. Purposive sampling involves

identifying and selecting individuals who possess specific knowledge or experience relevant to the phenomenon of interest. Representatives from Delta Community Radio programmers, farmers, the business community, women, and youth in Soroti Municipality were chosen using this technique.

### **3.3 Sample Size**

The sample size comprised 26 respondents, including key informant interviewees (KIIs) and focus group discussants (FGDs). These respondents represented Delta Community Radio programmers, farmers, the business community, women, and youth in Soroti Municipality. The selection of the sample size was based on the availability and relevance of respondents' knowledge and experience related to the phenomenon of interest, following non-probability purposive sampling. The actual number of respondents depended on saturation levels. The FGDs consisted of 2 groups of 10 participants each, and 6 Delta Radio staff members were interviewed.

### **3.4 Data Collection Methods**

A qualitative approach to data collection was integral to the research strategy, utilizing face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs).

#### **3.4.1 Face-to-Face Interviews**

Face-to-face interviews provide a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena by offering context to other data (Stuckey, 2013; Jamshed, 2014). They are particularly useful when little is known about the study phenomenon or when detailed insights are required from individual informants (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Muylaert et al., 2014). An interactive approach was adopted during these interviews

to maximize cooperation from respondents, emphasizing flexibility, adaptiveness, depth, and realism. Eighteen respondents representing Delta Community Radio programmers, adult community members, and youth in Soroti Municipality were interviewed, with the specific number depending on data saturation.

### **3.4.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

Focus group discussions are a qualitative method used to explore social issues deeply. They gather data from a deliberately chosen group of individuals rather than from a statistically representative sample of the broader population (Ladimeji, 2013). The strength of FGDs lies in their ability to reveal group perspectives, the range of opinions and ideas, and inconsistencies within a community regarding beliefs, experiences, and practices (Creswell, 2013). In this study, FGDs were conducted with farmers, the business community, women, and youth in Soroti Municipality. Three focus groups were formed: (i) farmers and the business community, (ii) women, and (iii) youth, each consisting of eight participants.

## **3.5 Data Collection Instruments**

The tools used for data collection were interview guides and a focus group discussion guide.

### **3.5.1 Interview Guides**

The interview guides, as presented in Appendix I, were prepared to facilitate data collection from key informants representing various sectors of the Delta Community Radio audience. Semi-structured interview guides were used, with discussion topics predetermined but allowing flexibility in the wording and sequencing of questions

to maintain a natural and conversational flow (Patton, 2002). The guides included introductory questions about Delta Community Radio, followed by probes to elicit participants' views on their engagement with community radio programs.

### **3.5.2 Focus Group Discussion Guide**

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide, as presented in Appendix I, was a carefully prepared meeting agenda. It involved identifying the main objectives of the study, developing key questions, and planning how to record the sessions. This guide was crucial for facilitating the discussion, ensuring even participation, carefully wording key questions, maintaining a neutral attitude, and summarizing the session to reflect opinions evenly and fairly.

### **3.6 Data Processing and Analysis**

The collected data were transcribed, checked for completeness through sorting, cleaning, and coding, and then prepared for analysis using NVivo software. Analysis and interpretation were conducted for each interview and focus group discussion using content analysis to understand the nature of the collected data before identifying emerging themes through the "Template analysis" approach. Qualitative data analysis aimed to identify similarities across multiple accounts and directions. Additionally, the analysis involved triangulating the two tools used in data collection: interview guides and the focus group discussion guide.

### **3.7 Validity and Reliability**

To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, the researcher pre-tested the tools to confirm their effectiveness in obtaining relevant information. Findings were

reported promptly to prevent information from being forgotten or misplaced. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher documented every decision made in developing the final research tools.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

The researcher obtained an introductory letter from the academic institution to ensure the authenticity of the data collection process. This letter also facilitated seeking support and guidance from necessary sources of information. Additionally, the researcher obtained consent from each discussant after fully disclosing the purpose, nature, and benefits of the study while allowing them to ask any relevant questions. Confidentiality of the information provided was ensured, and respondents were assured of anonymity, especially for those whose lives and jobs could be at risk after disclosing information.

### **3.9 Limitations**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was challenging to gather large groups of people in one place, adhering to the Ministry of Health's standard operating procedures. This affected the focus group discussions, as participants required complete assurance of their safety. Additionally, the study population was not representative of all community members, meaning that some opinions remained unrepresented. Therefore, further studies are recommended to include regions that may have been overlooked in this research.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents and analyzes the study's findings in alignment with the specific objectives outlined in Chapter One. It is divided into three sections: the first section examines the nature of audience participation in community radio programs, the second section explores the current barriers to audience engagement, and the third section identifies solutions for overcoming these barriers.

#### **4.1 Nature of Participation of Audiences in Delta Community Radio**

This section addresses the first specific objective, which is to examine the nature of audience participation in community radio programs. The findings are categorized into listenership engagement, calls in shows and Participation in talk shows on Delta Community Radio.

##### **4.1.1 Listenership Engagement**

The findings indicate that Delta Radio listeners are given opportunities to make suggestions regarding programming. According to the radio staff, the community's best interests are considered before developing any program content. The radio station conducts research to identify pressing community needs, which then inform the content of the shows. This is evidenced by one of the interviews with the staff:

...Our listeners are encouraged to freely make suggestions regarding the content. Annually, we engage with the communities to discuss the challenges they encounter as listeners and to gather their suggestions for content they would like to hear on the radio. Additionally, we offer contact details through which listeners can call in to share their ideas. We also extend invitations to

our listeners to visit our radio station for further information. **(KII 15: Delta Radio staff, May 2022)**

The listeners also confirmed their active participation and contribution to the programming of Delta Radio revealing that they are provided with an opportunity to make suggestions regarding the type of programs aired. A listeners expressed their views when asked if they are given a chance to participate or contribute to programming

Yes, we are given the opportunity. There is a statement I often hear on this broadcasting station: '...please let us know how we can serve you better.' However, not many people pay attention to this statement or understand its significance later. I believe that such a statement is an invitation to any listener to contribute by calling or visiting the radio station. **(KII 9: vendor/businessman, May 2022)**

Listeners of Delta Radio are actively encouraged to contribute suggestions for programming content. The station engages with the community annually to discuss challenges and gather suggestions, indicating a strong emphasis on community involvement and responsiveness to listener needs.

#### **4.1.2 Call-in Shows at Delta Community Radio**

Delta Radio actively promotes audience engagement through call-in shows. These segments encourage listeners to participate directly by calling in to share their opinions, ask questions, and contribute to discussions on various topics. The station

effectively promotes these segments, making it clear that audience input is valued and encouraged.

In most programs, the audience are encouraged to speak their minds except during the news segments. It seems like they want to ensure the news is accurate, so they don't let us call in there, but that's alright. It's nice to know we can share our opinions on other shows, keeping the conversation lively and engaging. **(KII 4: farmer, May 2022).**

This active promotion creates an atmosphere where listeners feel empowered to engage with the content and voice their thoughts. The study observed that call-in shows on Delta Radio prompt a strong response from listeners, particularly when addressing pertinent or controversial topics. Discussions on issues directly impacting the community, such as Agriculture, land ownership rights or healthcare access, consistently attract a significant number of callers.

During agricultural programs, we're usually given a chance to call and ask questions or make any other contributions. **(KII 1: farmer, May 2022).**

This active promotion creates an atmosphere where listeners feel empowered to engage with the content and voice their thoughts. The study observed that call-in shows on Delta Radio prompt a strong response from listeners, particularly when addressing pertinent or controversial topics. Discussions on issues directly impacting the community, such as Agriculture, land ownership rights or healthcare access, consistently attract a significant number of callers.



#### 4.1.3 Participation in Talk Shows at Delta Community Radio

The study conducted at Delta Radio sheds light on the dynamics of audience participation in talk shows, revealing significant insights into the station's engagement with its community. Firstly, Delta Radio actively involves community members as guests on its talk shows, showcasing a diverse range of backgrounds from local experts to everyday citizens. This inclusive approach ensures that the talk shows authentically reflect the community's interests and concerns, fostering a sense of representation and inclusivity within the programming. Moreover, talk shows at Delta Radio provide a platform for community members to share their experiences, expertise, and perspectives on various relevant issues. Guests are encouraged to delve into topics spanning from local development initiatives to cultural traditions, thereby facilitating meaningful dialogue and collaboration among community members. Through these discussions, Delta Radio nurtures an environment where community voices are heard and valued, promoting a sense of shared understanding and collective action among listeners:

Indeed, the radio addresses developmental issues through programs such as Enerata and Apol wok. These programs air twice a week for at least two hours. It is within these programs that topics such as politics, good governance, agriculture, economy, and income-generating activities, among others, are extensively discussed. **(KII 15: Delta Radio staff, May 2022)**

The programming at Delta Radio is focused on benefiting rural communities and families by empowering our audiences and improving their social and

economic conditions. I believe we stand out as the only community radio in this region operating in the interest of the communities. **(KII 15: Delta Radio staff, May 2022)**

Delta Radio also covers moral issues. We frequently host family talk shows where topics related to gender-based violence and family conflicts are thoroughly discussed. The youth-focused talk show addresses various issues affecting young people such as drug and substance abuse. Additionally, children are taught respect and morals through our children's program. **(KII 15: Delta Radio staff, May 2022)**

Delta Radio effectively involves community members in talk shows, ensuring diverse representation and addressing a wide range of community interests. This inclusive approach fosters community dialogue, empowerment, and a sense of shared understanding among listeners.

Furthermore, the study highlights the role of talk shows as forums for facilitating dialogue and collaboration within the community. Hosts actively engage with guests and listeners, encouraging constructive conversations and mutual respect. This environment of open dialogue not only fosters community cohesion but also encourages active participation in the public discourse, thereby strengthening the station's connection with its audience and reinforcing its role as a platform for community engagement and empowerment.

## **4.2 Hinderances to Audience Participation in Delta Community Radio**

This section presents findings related to the second objective of the study, which focused on identifying hindrances to audience participation in Delta Community Radio. These challenges are linked to studio programming and the level of community engagement with the listenership.

### **4.2.1 Limited On-Air Time**

Limited on-air time emerged as a significant obstacle to audience participation at Delta Community Radio. Interviews revealed that show hosts often cut callers short due to time constraints, leaving listeners feeling unheard. Participants expressed frustration over the limited time allocated for sharing their views, with some feeling rushed or unable to fully express their opinions before the program ends:

Limited on-air time for listener contributions is a significant barrier to audience participation at Delta Radio. Many listeners feel rushed or unable to fully express their views, indicating a need for better time management and allocation for listener engagement during programs.

### **4.2.2 Biased Programming Content**

Biased programming content is a significant issue affecting audience engagement. Delta Radio is perceived as primarily catering to the Catholic community, which creates a feeling of exclusion among listeners from other religious or interest groups. This bias in content has led to dissatisfaction, as the station fails to address the diverse needs of the entire community. The focus on spiritual matters, while important, leaves out critical issues that are relevant to a broader audience,

reducing overall engagement. Below are some excerpts from the interviews when asked about the extent of their engagement with the radio station:

I know for sure that Delta Radio is a church-founded radio station, so most of its programs address spiritual needs. The rest of the community's needs are either given less time or not broadcast at all. **(KII 3: farmer, May 2022)**

Delta Radio's programming is perceived as biased towards the Catholic community, with insufficient attention to other community needs. This lack of diversity in content reduces listener engagement, suggesting a need for more inclusive and varied programming to address broader community interests.

#### **4.2.3 The limited programming content**

The limited programming content further hinders the station's ability to engage with a diverse audience. The programming schedule tends to focus on a narrow range of topics, primarily centered around spiritual matters, with few programs that address other critical community issues, such as education, health, or economic development. This limited content offering may not reflect the station's intent but results in reduced listener interest and engagement, particularly among those seeking a more varied set of topics beyond religious discourse.

#### **4.2.4 Low Social Responsibility**

Listeners voiced concerns about Delta Radio's perceived low social responsibility and community engagement. Many felt that the station prioritized commercial interests over serving as the voice of the community, allocating less airtime to crucial topics affecting the community directly. This shift towards a more commercial focus led to

a decline in listenership and participation, as listeners sought out alternative radio stations that better addressed their needs and concerns:

The radio station does not operate to our expectation. It is more commercial of late than it is communal. To the best of my knowledge, community radios focus less on advertisement. This is not the case for Delta of late. Advertisement takes up a lot of time. **(KII 5: farmer, May 2022)**

Listeners perceive Delta Radio as prioritizing commercial interests over community needs, leading to reduced engagement. The station's focus on advertisements and limited coverage of crucial community topics suggests a need to realign priorities to better serve and engage the community.

#### **4.2.5 Socio-Economic Factors**

Economic challenges such as household poverty hinder audience participation. Participants noted the difficulty in affording radio gadgets and airtime which affects their ability to engage with Delta Radio's programs despite recognizing its importance:

Several factors limit my participation on the radio, including high poverty rates and the lack of essential gadgets like phones. Therefore, even though the willingness to participate exists, these barriers prevent me from doing so. **(FGD: Participant 4, May 2022)**

Economic challenges such as poverty and the cost of radio gadgets and airtime hinder audience participation. Addressing these socio-economic barriers is crucial to enhancing engagement, as they significantly impact the ability of listeners to interact with Delta Radio's programs.

#### **4.3 Recommendations for the Identified Barriers to Audience Participation at Delta Radio**

This section presents and discusses the findings regarding the third specific objective. In this objective, the study explored recommendations for addressing the identified barriers to audience participation in community radio. Participants were asked to share strategies on how Delta Radio can enhance audience participation in its programs.

##### **4.3.1 New Programs**

Based on the findings from the interviews and focus group discussions, it is recommended to introduce new and improved programs aimed at attracting a broader audience to enhance listenership. To achieve this, it is suggested to begin by exploring the interests of the community. Listeners emphasize the importance of introducing new programs targeting youth, agriculture, health, and women and gender topics:

Delta Community Radio should increase the number of programs targeting the youth in the community, as they are the most affected group. This initiative will help address some of their challenges, such as alcoholism and drug abuse.

**(KII 13: student, May 2022)**

I would suggest introducing more agriculture programs and placing additional focus on health programs. Agriculture programs are essential due to the unpredictable rainy seasons in the past two years, which necessitates guidance on alternative farming methods. Health education is also crucial for providing information on coping strategies during the Covid era. **(KII 1: farmer, May 2022)**

I believe it would be beneficial to include more programs that address the needs of women in the community. They often face discrimination and require empowerment. **(KII 3: farmer, May 2022)**

There should be more programs to cater to the youth, as they constitute the largest audience. The radio needs to be more inclusive and balanced in its programming, not solely focusing on the Catholic community. **(KII 6: vendor/businessman, May 2022)**

Introducing new programs targeting youth, agriculture, health, and gender issues is recommended to attract a broader audience. Such programs would address specific community needs and interests, potentially enhancing listenership and participation.

#### **4.3.2 Listeners' Involvement in Programming**

While it's acknowledged that some level of listener input already exists, there's a need to strengthen and formalize this process at Delta Radio. By intentionally involving listeners in all stages of programming, the station can better understand

and address community needs. Strengthening this aspect of listener involvement will enhance transparency and foster a stronger connection with the audience.

The radio station should continue involving members of the audience in the programming process. This will enable the broadcasters to better cater to the needs of the community. **(KII 2: farmer, May 2022)**

I believe listeners opinions should be considered during programming. This allows them to suggest programs that appeal to them. **(KII 1: farmer, May 2022)**

Strengthening listener involvement in the programming process is essential for effectively addressing community needs. By actively engaging listeners throughout the programming journey, we can ensure that the content resonates with our audience, fostering higher engagement and satisfaction. This proactive approach will enable us to better serve our community and strengthen our connection with our listeners.

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#### **4.3.3 Balanced Programs**

Listeners also suggest that the radio station should balance its programs to cater to various community needs, rather than solely focusing on spiritual ones. Being a Catholic-founded station, the bias towards one religion marginalizes other religions in the programming content. According to the findings, by balancing the programming, Delta should equally prioritize other programs such as health, agriculture, and education:



The radio station should balance its programming to avoid focusing excessively on spiritual needs but also allocate more airtime for health and educational programs. Educational programs will be particularly crucial for the youth, especially during this period of school lockdown. **(KII 2: farmer, May 2022)**

Balancing the programming to include more health, agriculture, and education content alongside spiritual programs is essential. This would cater to the diverse needs of the community, reducing bias and increasing overall listener engagement and satisfaction.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has provided an in-depth analysis of the findings related to audience participation on Delta Community Radio. The research examined the nature of audience participation, categorized into listenership, audience needs and programming, listenership engagement, and the social responsibility of Delta Community Radio. Additionally, the chapter addressed the hindrances to audience participation, identifying challenges related to studio programming and community engagement with the listenership. Furthermore, the chapter presented recommendations for overcoming these barriers, as suggested by the respondents. These recommendations offer valuable insights for enhancing audience participation and improving the overall effectiveness of community radio programming.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DICUSSION OF FINDINGS**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter critically examines the data presented in the previous chapter, analyzing and discussing the findings in relation to the study's objectives and research questions. The aim is to integrate these findings with existing literature, providing a comprehensive discussion on the implications for both theory and practice. The chapter is structured to first address the nature of audience participation, followed by the hinderances to audience participation, integration with existing literature, and concluding with the implications of the study.

#### **5.1 Nature of Delta Radio Audience Participation**

Insights from staff interviews reveal that the radio station prioritizes community participation. The station actively seeks and values community input, ensuring that programs are developed with the community's best interests in mind. This aligns with previous research emphasizing the role of community radio as a pro-people medium, owned and operated by the communities it serves (Dahal, 2013). Additionally, the commitment of Delta radio to fulfilling the cultural and religious needs of rural communities, as suggested by Wabwire (2013) and Al-Hassan et al. (2011), has contributed to its routine listenership, with individuals tuning in regularly to access relevant content. Strengthening listener involvement in programming not only fosters a sense of ownership and belonging within the community but also enhances the station's connection with its audience, positioning it as a vital source of information and cultural expression."

One of the noticeable aspects in the results of this study is Delta Radio's active efforts to foster audience engagement through call-in shows. The station effectively communicates to its audience that their input is valued and encouraged leading to a robust response particularly on issues directly impacting the community such as agriculture, land ownership rights and healthcare access. This participatory approach resonates with the findings of Al-Hassan et al. (2011), highlighting the role of community radios in nurturing a sense of ownership and belonging within the community. To further enhance audience participation and satisfaction, the report suggests extending the duration of on-air calls and facilitating more extensive discussions, in line with insights from Lehmann et al. (2012). Therefore, Delta Radio's promotion of audience engagement through call-in shows not only effectively elicits a strong response from listeners but also aligns with scholarly literature on community radio and audience engagement, indicating potential avenues for deeper community involvement and improvement

According to the study, Delta Radio actively involves community members as guests on its talk shows reflecting the inclusive approach advocated by Nabulya (2022). By featuring a diverse range of backgrounds from local experts to everyday citizens, Delta Radio ensures that its talk shows authentically represent the community's interests and concerns hence fostering a sense of inclusivity within the programming. This participatory approach not only promotes community representation but also empowers the participants to voice their opinions and contribute to discussions in real-time. Additionally, the participants are given the opportunity to call in and share their views and ideas during the shows, as highlighted by Kitembo et al. (2023).

Furthermore, Delta Radio facilitates meaningful dialogue and collaboration among community members through its interactive talk show programming, echoing the findings highlighted by Mukasa (2021). Talk shows serve as a platform for community members to share their experiences, expertise, and perspectives on various relevant issues, from local development initiatives to cultural traditions. By leveraging live interactions such as call-ins and SMS responses, Delta Radio promotes community engagement and participation, fostering a sense of shared understanding and collective action among listeners. Through these strategies, Delta Radio nurtures an environment where community voices are valued, contributing to the station's role as a vital platform for community dialogue and empowerment.

While the results of this study confirmed the challenge of low participation through letter writing among audience members, it also shed light on the factors contributing to this phenomenon. The analysis revealed that despite concerted efforts to encourage feedback and engagement, the number of letters received by presenters remained limited, indicating that letter writing is not widely utilized as a mode of audience interaction at the radio station. These findings were further supported by discussions with Delta Radio staff, as highlighted by Mukasa (2021), who confirmed the scarcity of letter submissions and the occasional nature of audience members providing written feedback, comments, or suggestions. The infrequency of letter submissions implies that this mode of participation is not widely embraced by the audience, presenting a significant challenge in fostering engagement through written communication.

## **5.2 Hinderances of Audience Participation.**

The results of this study prove that time constraints were a significant hindrance to audience participation in Delta Radio (FGD: Participant 1, May 2022; KII 4, May 2022). Listeners expressed frustration with being given limited time to express their views and opinions on-air. This finding is consistent with research conducted by Lehmann et al. (2012), who posit that engagement requires listeners to invest time, attention, and emotion in media content. Providing listeners with sufficient time to engage can lead to more meaningful interactions and increased audience participation.

Participants in this study voiced concerns about Delta Radio being biased towards the Catholic community thus potentially neglecting the interests of other religious and cultural groups (KII 3, May 2022; KII 5, May 2022). This discriminatory broadcasting approach can alienate certain sections of the audience and hinder their participation. Similar concerns regarding inclusivity and representation have been raised in studies conducted by Oh, Bellur, and Sundar (2010) and Fraser & Estrada (2001), emphasizing the importance of community radio stations catering to the needs of diverse communities.

The results of this study supported the notion that time constraints were a significant hindrance to audience participation in Delta Radio (FGD: Participant 1, May 2022; KII 4, May 2022). Participants expressed frustration with the limited time given to express their views and opinions on-air. This finding aligns with previous research by Lehmann et al. (2012), which suggests that engagement requires listeners to invest time, attention, and emotion in media content. Providing listeners with sufficient

time to engage can lead to more meaningful interactions and increased audience participation.

The study found that household poverty was a hindrance to audience participation, affecting the ability of some individuals to afford radio gadgets and airtime (FGD: Participant 4, May 2022). This aligns with findings from Serwornoo (2012), who identified economic challenges as a barrier to participation on community radio. Ensuring affordability and accessibility for all segments of the community is vital for promoting equitable audience participation.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

#### **5.3.1 Diversify Program Content to Address Community Needs**

Respondents suggested that to enhance audience participation and attract a broader listenership, Delta Radio should diversify its program content to address a wide range of community needs. Listeners have expressed interest in educational and developmental programs, entertainment, and health (KII 1, May 2022; KII 2, May 2022). Introducing new programs targeting youth, agriculture, health, and gender issues will attract fresh audiences and ensure that the station caters to a broader demographic (KII 13, May 2022; KII 1, May 2022; KII 3, May 2022; KII 6, May 2022). This approach aligns with the role of community radio in promoting participation by addressing cultural and community-specific needs (Tomoko, 2013; Ambekar, 2004; Islam, 2002; Kumar, 2003; Pavarala, 2007). By diversifying program content, Delta Radio can better engage its audience and foster a sense of connection and relevance to their lives. Additionally, incorporating educational and developmental programs

can provide valuable learning opportunities for listeners, while entertainment segments can create a more enjoyable and engaging listening experience.

### **5.3.2 Increase Listener Involvement in Programming**

Consistently cited by respondents was the need for Delta Radio to foster a stronger sense of community ownership and participation. To achieve this, actively involving listeners in the programming process is paramount (KII 15, May 2022). Management and staff should proactively seek feedback and suggestions from the community, allowing them to have a direct impact on the content (Fraser & Estrada, 2001). By conducting community fora and inviting listeners to share their opinions, Delta Radio can gain a deeper understanding of the needs and interests of its audience. This participatory approach not only empowers the community but also ensures that the programs are more relevant and engaging to the listeners (Howley, 2010). It allows the community to define their own development paths and strengthens the connection between Delta Radio and its audience. By actively involving listeners in the programming process, Delta Radio can create a sense of ownership and foster a stronger bond within the community.

### **5.3.3 Balance Program Content to Address Various Community Interests**

To overcome the perception of bias and appeal to a broader audience, Delta Radio should balance its program content to address various community interests (KII 5, May 2022). While spiritual content is essential, the station should allocate sufficient airtime to critical topics that affect the community, such as health, education, agriculture, and governance (KII 2, May 2022). This balanced approach will ensure

that the station caters to the diverse needs of the audience and fosters a deeper sense of engagement (Bosch, 2011; Davies & Tacchi, 2011).

#### **5.3.4 Addressing Time Constraints for Audience Engagement**

Participants consistently cited time constraints as a significant obstacle to audience participation (FGD: Participant 1, May 2022; KII 4, May 2022). This finding aligns with the broader literature on the importance of allocating ample time for listeners to interact with media content (Lehmann et al., 2012) emphasizes that allowing sufficient time for audiences to absorb and respond to messages is crucial for cultivating a meaningful connection. To address this issue, participants recommended that Delta Radio prioritize avoiding rushed on-air calls by allocating at least **5 minutes per respondent** during live segments, as the currently allocated **2 minutes** were considered insufficient for meaningful engagement. By providing more time for audience interactions, the station can foster deeper conversations and enhance its connection with listeners.

#### **5.3.5 Tackling Socio-Economic Barriers to Audience Participation**

Delta Radio must confront socio-economic barriers that hinder audience involvement. Poverty, as highlighted by participants (FGD: Participant 4, May 2022), often impedes individuals' ability to afford radio gadgets and airtime. To address this challenge, the station could explore community-driven initiatives, such as collaborations with local organizations or sponsors, to make radios and airtime more affordable for disadvantaged communities. By improving access to radio gadgets and airtime, Delta Radio can ensure that socio-economic factors no longer serve as barriers to audience engagement (Serwornoo, 2012).



To enhance audience participation, Delta Radio should address various factors that hinder engagement. Respondents have suggested diversifying program content to address a wide range of community needs, including educational, developmental, entertainment, and health-related programs (KII 15, May 2022). By introducing new programs targeting youth, agriculture, health, and gender issues, the station can attract fresh audiences and a foster sense of community ownership and participation (Fraser & Estrada, 2001).

## CHAPTER SIX

### 6.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to evaluate audience participation and identify reasons for the low participation in radio programs at Delta Community Radio Station in Soroti, Uganda. This final chapter presents a summary of the findings from the preceding chapters, conclusions drawn from those findings, recommendations, and suggestions for future research areas.

In summary, the study sheds light on the nature of audience participation at Delta Radio, revealing that listeners are given opportunities to contribute to programming through suggestions, with a focus on community interests such as education, health, environment, and agriculture. However, hindrances to participation are evident, including limited engagement time, gaps in programming that fail to address the needs of all listeners, and a perceived bias towards the Catholic community. Socio-economic factors, such as household poverty, further hinder participation by limiting access to radio gadgets and airtime.

Enhancing community participation emerges as a crucial strategy for Delta Radio to better serve its audience and foster local development. Recommendations by listeners emphasize the importance of integrating new programs targeting youth, agriculture, health, and gender, as well as the need for spiritual inclusivity and strengthening community engagement in the programming process.

By aligning its initiatives more closely with community aspirations for empowerment and development, Delta Radio can play a more impactful role as a platform for

knowledge dissemination, consensus-building, and collective advancement within the communities it serves.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested to improve audience engagement in radio programs at Delta Community Radio Station in Soroti, Uganda:

### **6.2.1 Regular Community Engagement and Mobilization**

Due to the low involvement of the community, Delta Radio should regularly engage and mobilize audiences through various outreach activities, workshops, committee meetings, and advertising campaigns. These outreach activities should be conducted frequently to ensure continuous engagement with the community. Whether funded or not, these activities provide an opportunity for the station to educate community members about the station's objectives and align them with the community's needs. This could include organizing community forums where listeners can discuss issues directly with radio staff, thus fostering a sense of ownership and involvement in the station's operations.

### **6.2.2 Addressing Programming Gaps**

To address programming gaps, Delta Community Radio should prioritize creative ways to tackle recurrent community issues such as agriculture, employment, women's and gender issues, and youth-related concerns. The station should conduct regular needs assessments to understand the evolving interests and concerns of the community. By diversifying its program content to include these critical areas, Delta

Radio can ensure that it remains relevant to its listeners. This may involve developing partnerships with local experts and organizations to produce informative and engaging content that resonates with the audience.

### **6.2.3 Collaboration with Local Government**

The local government should collaborate closely with Delta Community Radio to resolve local issues from both national and global perspectives. This collaboration can be facilitated through regular meetings and consultations where local leaders can share insights on pressing community issues that require attention. By aligning radio content with local development agendas, Delta Radio can play a pivotal role in addressing community challenges and promoting socio-economic development.

### **6.3.4 Support from Civil Society Organizations**

Civil society organizations should support community radio stations by providing more training on programming and implementing participatory engagement in their operations. These organizations can offer workshops and training sessions focused on enhancing the skills of radio staff in areas such as fundraising, outreach activities, social marketing, publicity, and public relations. Additionally, training in technical aspects and content creation can help ensure high-quality programming that meets the needs of the community.

### **6.2.5 Enhancing Access to Radio Gadgets and Promotional Materials**

Sustained efforts to increase listenership and participation can be achieved through simple methods such as promoting community listenership or providing free media like radio handsets and promotional materials. Delta Radio could partner with local

businesses and non-profits to distribute affordable or free radio sets to disadvantaged households. Promotional campaigns could include giveaways and contests to encourage community members to tune in regularly. Ensuring that everyone has access to radio technology is crucial for fostering inclusive participation.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I

#### INTERVIEW GUIDE

**Dear Respondent,**

I am Leah Atai, a student at Uganda Christian University (UCU), Mukono pursuing a Masters in Journalism and Media Studies. I am undertaking research aimed at analysing of audience participation in community radio programmes in Eastern Uganda, a case of Delta Community Radio, Soroti Uganda., a case study of Delta Community Radio, Soroti, Uganda. Such a study requires input from experts whose contribution will not only help make the research successful. It is in the light of this that I seek your contribution, to this research by way of completing the attached form which will take not more than five minutes of your time. In return for your assistance, the findings of this survey will be fed back to you for your consideration and further input. Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

#### **Section 1: Personal Information**

**1. Age:**

*Please specify your age range.*

**2. Occupation:**

*Please describe your current occupation.*

**3. Language Spoken:**

*Which language(s) do you primarily speak at home or in your community?*

#### **Section 2: Listenership**

**4. Listening Habits:**

When do you typically listen to DELTA Community Radio, and for approximately how long per session?

.....

**5. Listening Needs:**

What are your expectations or needs when tuning into DELTA Community Radio?

.....

**6. Community Catering:**

To what extent do you believe DELTA Community Radio meets your needs and those of the broader community?

.....

**7. Program Preferences:**

Which programs on DELTA Community Radio do you particularly enjoy? Please explain why.

.....

**8. Program Dislikes:**

Are there any programs on DELTA Community Radio that you dislike? Please elaborate on your reasons.

.....

**9. Program Suggestions:**

Are there any new programs you would like DELTA Community Radio to introduce? What topics should these programs cover and why?

.....

**Section 3: Participation**

**10. Opportunity for Suggestions:**

Are you provided opportunities to suggest new program ideas to DELTA Community Radio? How are these opportunities communicated to you?

.....

**11. Frequency of Suggestions:**

How frequently do you make suggestions about programming to the station?

.....

**12. Contribution Channels:**

Through which methods or channels do you typically make your contributions to programming (e.g., phone, email, social media)?

.....

**13. Community Meetings:**

Are you aware of any meetings or forums between DELTA Community Radio and its listeners within your community? If so, how are these communicated?

.....

**14. Information Dissemination:**

How does DELTA Community Radio keep its listeners informed about station news and updates? How effective do you find these methods?

.....

**Section 4: Social Responsibility**

**15. Community Representation:**

To what extent do you think that DELTA Community Radio acts as a voice for your community?

Voice of the Community:

.....

Can you provide examples of how the station has successfully represented or advocated for community interests?



.....

**16. Improvement Suggestions:**

What suggestions do you have for improving DELTA Community Radio’s services to better serve the community? Are there specific areas where you feel the station could enhance its impact?

.....

**Closing:**

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your insights are invaluable to improving our services and engagement with the community.

**APPENDIX II**

**STATION PROGRAMMER INTERVIEW GUIDE**

**Section A: Programming**

1. Do you think that DELTA Community Radio covers local events in the community?

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2. Please mention examples and the rate at which local events are covered by the Station.

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3. Do you think that DELTA Community Radio covers moral issues in the community?

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4. Please mention examples and the rate at which moral issues are covered by the Station.

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5. Does the Station cover vital developmental issues in the community?

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6. Mention examples and the rate at which the Station covers developmental issues.

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7. How are the program contents developed or selected by the station?

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**Section B: Audience participation**

8. Are listeners given any opportunity to make suggestions concerning the content development of the station's programs?

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9. Does the Station organize meetings with listeners in the community? If yes, how often do you meet the listeners?

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10. Why do you meet with the listeners and what are the usual discussions during these meetings?

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11. Can DELTA Community Radio be referred to as the voice of the community? If yes, please mention situations where the Station functions as the voice of the community.

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12. As an institution-based radio station, what are the main features of your programming that distinguishes you from other categories of community radio stations?

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13. How do you use these features to affect the community that you serve?

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**Thank You**

**APPENDIX III**

**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION SCHEDULE**

**Section A: Guidelines**

1. Moderator ensures that all details about the respondents are well recorded.  
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2. Moderator explains all the conditions of participation in the discussions as per the ethical guidelines.  
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3. Moderator explains the purpose and importance of the study.  
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4. Moderator informs the participants that discussions will be recorded for academic/research purposes.  
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5. The discussion will not last more than 30 minutes.  
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6. Exploring programming and audience participation.  
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7. Is there any link with your needs being met by the radio station and your involvement or participation in the radio station?  
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8. Do you think that the radio station has enough platforms for listeners to engage, create and share ideas that will enhance the growth and development of the community?

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9. Are you aware of any meeting between DELTA Community Radio and its listeners in your community?

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10. Do you think that listeners should be involved in the affairs and programming of a community radio station?

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11. As a listener, have you been given any opportunity to make suggestions concerning the content development of the station's programs?

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12. Are your contributions valued by the radio station?

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13. Do you think that this radio station is doing enough to involve you as listeners in its programming?  
Elaborate on this?

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14. Do you see community radio as a tool for representation and participation in the development of communities?

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15. Give suggestions on how the radio station could improve community participation in its programming and other related activities.

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16. In your own view, can DELTA Community Radio be referred to as the voice of the community?

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17. If yes, please mention situations where the Station functions as the voice of your community.

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18. Any other comments?

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**Thank You**