

The Impact of Economic News Broadcast in the Poverty Reduction Strategy

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Abstract

This paper tests two hypotheses: the first is that broadcasting economic news can play a very important role in the poverty reduction efforts in developing countries. The second hypothesis is that the quality and quantity of economic news broadcast by Cameroon's national television is scanty. I take a supportive view toward the argument that economic news broadcast contributes to the poverty reduction strategy in developing countries. My fieldwork in the Cameroon Radio Television corporation indicated poor quality and quantity economic news broadcast.

Introduction

In 1996, the IMF and the World Bank introduced the HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) Debt Initiative, a program aimed at providing debt relief against country commitments to reduce poverty and pursue economic reforms¹. Since then poverty reduction has taken centre stage at the World Bank in particular. According to Birdsall (2003), the HIPC Debt Initiative is also expected to affect future donor behaviour, particularly the ability and willingness of donors to direct aid to its best uses². The central role accorded to poverty reduction was institutionalized with the announcement of the Comprehensive Development Framework in January 1999, and the parallel reform of the HIPC Initiative in tandem with the introduction of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). As a result, countries seeking debt relief through the HIPC scheme must produce interim and full Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and negotiate approval for them from the Bank. Through the HIPC Initiative as of September 2005, nominal debt service relief of more than US\$ 56 billion has been approved for 28 developing countries, reducing their Net Present Value of external debt by approximately two-thirds. Of these countries, 19 have reached the completion point and have been granted unconditional debt service relief of over US\$37 billion. However, to have the PRSPs approved, the population of concerned countries has to endure certain sacrifices and may be very impatient. The latter may therefore cause political and economic instability.

AFRODAD (2002) stated in its report that

“The major highlight from the Burkina Faso study was that the PRSP approval was preceded by sensitisation of government ministries on the PRSP and the need to ensure that development strategies focused on poverty reduction. The government also run television programmes to interest civil society in the PRSP”³

Television should therefore be regarded as one of the platforms for government officials to respond to queries from the public on the PRSP. Television may decimate information for consultation and may encourage the public to contribute. The World Bank plans to run an annual television workshop in close cooperation with media practitioners in various developing countries⁴. Vogt (2004) argued

“The poor often lack the means to effectively voice their needs, learn about available public services, and pressure policy makers to be responsive to their interests and demands. Television can improve information flow and communication services to make governments and organizations serving the poor more efficient, transparent and accountable. It can help give voice to the otherwise disenfranchised”⁵

The above statement is an indication that broadcasting economic news can play a very important role in poverty reduction efforts. Poverty is not only a question of money. It is also how informed and knowledgeable a person is. Television can decisively improve the situation through better information flow and communication services. Feather (1994) confirms this when he says:

“The value of information is not intrinsic, but lies in the uses to which it can be put. From these uses, advantages can be derived which are beneficial to the ‘owner’ of the information and which would not have been attainable without it. If access to information is controlled, whether economically or in any other way, the potential benefits of possessing it will be lost by those to whom it is denied. These propositions underpin the concepts of ‘information wealth’ and ‘information poverty’ and their relationship to economic development”⁶.

The present paper breaks new ground. Firstly, it contributes to the existing literature by developing a demand and supply model for the television industry. I take a supportive view toward the argument that economic news broadcast contributes to the poverty reduction efforts in developing countries. Secondly, I undertake an analysis that aims at filling the lacuna created by

the lack of published works on the quality and quantity of economic news broadcast by Cameroon's national television. My fieldwork in the Cameroon national television corporation indicated poor quality and quantity economic news broadcast.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. Section two undertakes a microeconomic analysis of the television industry. Section three carries out fieldwork analysis on the economic news broadcast in Cameroon's national television and finally section four concludes.

Microeconomic Analysis of the Television Industry

An examination of the nature of supply and demand for television news explains much about the performance of the television industry and its role and importance in the Poverty Reduction Strategy in developing countries.

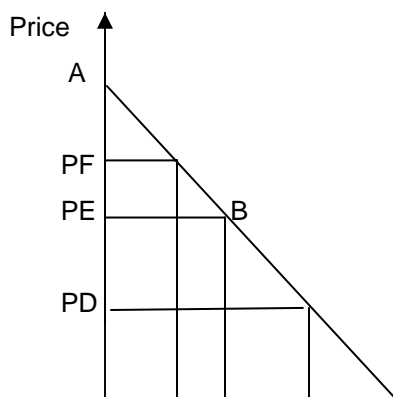
The Television News Demand Model

One reason why people watch so much television is that most of it is supplied free. Even where consumers pay for television over cable or through license fees the cost of an additional programme is zero, except for the very few opportunities to date for pay-per-view television. Holding all other factors than the price to watch the programme constant, one can derive the demand curve for any particular television programme.

The simplest demand function is: $Q_d = f(P)$

Where Q_d is the number of programmes demanded, f is a general unspecified function and P the price of the programme. The relationship between the quantity demanded for a television programme and its price is inverse, which means that the demand curve for television news slopes down from left to right as indicated in Figure 1. We could see from figure 1 that the number of viewers decreases as the price rises.

Figure 1: The demand curve for television news showing consumer surplus



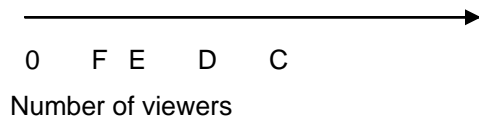


Figure 1 also illustrates the consumer surplus concept. The consumer's surplus (CS) is the amount of money a consumer would be willing to pay rather than go without a certain service altogether. At the price of zero, for example, the consumer surplus is represented by OAC. Regardless of the charge free nature of the programme, it is worth OAC. The consumer surplus concept is important for a theoretical understanding of the economics of television. Watching television may be without price but it is not without cost to the viewer. Even where the consumer watches a free show at no monetary cost, he must sacrifice the opportunity of doing something else with his time. Television is a time – intensive activity and it competes for the limited time in the day with other activities. After they have worked and slept, most people worldwide have very little time left for leisure. A demand curve for television news is constructed on the assumption that “other things remain equal” (*ceteris paribus*). In other words, it is assumed that none of the determinants of demand, other than price, changes. The effect of a change in price is then simply illustrated by a movement along the demand curve. However, if there is a change in other determinants such as the quest for economic news, for example, then the economic audiences will defect and the demand curve will shift to the left. It may be argued that the economic audiences are not profitable to the television industry. However, the government runs the majority of national television in poor countries. Their goal is not therefore to maximise profit but to maximise the benefit to society. If a public station airs good economic programmes contributing to poverty reduction and subsequently increasing the standard of living of viewers, then the goal of maximising the benefit to society means maximising the consumer surplus from the public channel.

The Nature of Economic News Demand

Because of the current economic crisis in various developing countries, economic news is in the public interest. The media and especially television should therefore be used for the economic news broadcast. Marshall (1964) pointed out that Lenin described the media as a collective propagandist, collective agitator, and collective organiser⁷. Currently, the main objective of developing country governments is to reduce poverty. Television could be utilised as one of the tools contributing to this aim by broadcasting economic news. Yet economic news broadcast on television has not been the practical success as expected. Television appears to be an ideal way by which to reach audiences in developing countries. In theory, television, especially interactive

television, could vehicle economic news as efficiently as schoolteachers, college and university lecturers. In such interaction, people making economic news programmes and people listening to them should work together to achieve some aim which they could both recognise. Many people believe that the media can play an enormous role in putting things right in any area where they are going wrong. The Poverty Reduction Strategy is experiencing a very slow pace in developing countries. Programs funded by international organisation such as the IMF and the World Bank need to be implemented on individuals with basic economic knowledge to generate the desired results. By setting up community television in remote areas and feeding individuals economic materials via satellite, broadcast, or videocassette should provide basic economic knowledge and increase the standard of living of the hundreds of millions of economic illiterates in developing countries. Many international organisation and government bodies have been willing to pay for such services as pointed out earlier in this paper. Television could be regarded as a cheap and efficient way of delivering economic message in developing countries at low cost. Television can bring image, story, and engaging approximation of the very act of intellectual discovery to individuals. Individuals may not demand economic news, but the government has to stimulate this demand, for example, by encouraging the production of programs with local superstars advocating the benefits of economic news in the poverty reduction efforts. The government has to be prepared for competition in the television industry. When individuals have a choice between economic news and commercial entertainment programmes, a huge proportion of individuals will choose entertainment programmes. Wherefore, the needs to stimulate the economic news demand in developing countries.

The Television News Supply Model

The number of programmes supplied may be defined as the number of programmes that television companies are willing and able to offer viewers. The following factors affect the numbers of programmes supplied.

- The price of the programme (P).

When the price of a programme rises, the number of programmes supplied will also rise. The higher the price of a programme, the more profitable it becomes to produce. Television companies will thus be encouraged to produce more of it by switching from producing less profitable programmes.

- The prices of factors of programme production (F).

The higher the costs of a programme production, the lower the profit made at any price. As costs rise, television companies will cut back on programme production; probably switching to alternative programmes whose cost has not risen so much.

- The goals of producing firms (G).

A profit-maximising television company will supply different programmes from a television that has a different goal. Such as contributing to poverty reduction.

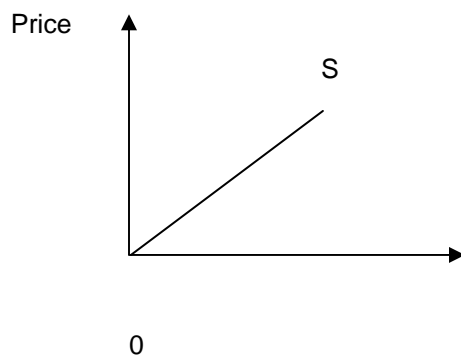
- The State of technology (S)

Technological advances can fundamentally alter the cost of programme production. The new supply vehicles for delivering television in developing countries are satellites, cable, videocassette recorder, DVD and online news as argued by Eveland (2004)⁸.

The above factors can be included in a supply function: $Q_s = g(P, F, G, S, A)$

Where Q_s is the number of programme supplied, g is a general unspecified function and the P, F, G, S are the factors that influence supply. This simply states that the market supply of programme X is a function of all variables listed in brackets, where A represents all other factors, such as the level of taxes and subsidies. The supply curve for programme X shows the relationship between the prices of program X and the number of programmes that television companies are willing and able to air at those prices, *ceteris paribus*. In other to isolate the relationship between the supply of programme X and its price, we need to make the *ceteris paribus* assumption and hold all other influencing factors unchanged. We then write:

$Q_s = g(P)$, *ceteris paribus*.



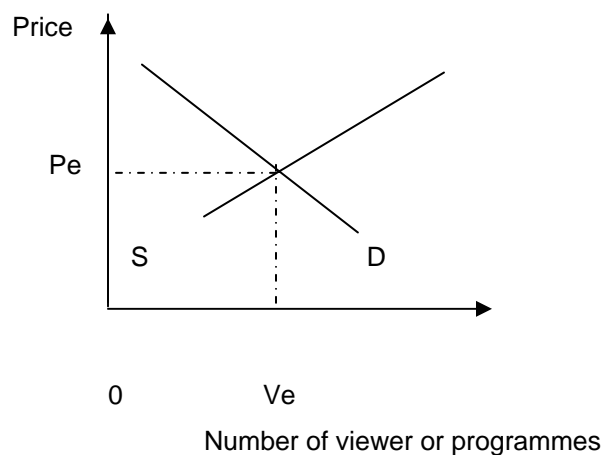
Number of viewers or number of programmes.

Figure 2: The supply curve for television news.

Similar to the demand curve, the effect of a change in the price of programme X, *ceteris paribus*, can be traced by movement along programme X's supply curve. A change in any of the influencing factors, except the price of X, causes a shift in programme X's market supply curve. For example, an increase in vehicles for delivering television will shift the supply curve to the right since satellites, cable, and VCRs mean a huge potential supply of programmes for consumers everywhere. In the current age of satellite and cable, government control will be even more difficult to enforce. National distinction will continue to be eroded. Before this could be possible, developing country governments have to use its influence to propagate economic news.

The Concept of Equilibrium in the Market for Television News Programmes

Figure 2: Equilibrium in the Market for programme X



The equilibrium price $0P_e$ corresponds to the intersection of the demand and the supply curve for the television news. At this equilibrium price, the television news that is willing and able to be supplied to the market of television programmes is just equal to the amount of programmes that viewers are willing and able to buy.

Economic News Cultivate Individuals

The public television quest to uplift individuals is rooted in what cultural historian Rubin (1992) calls "self-culture". Self-culture was promoted as a universal ideal by the cultural reformers of the late 1800s. Against the backdrop of tumultuous industrial capitalist democracy, the promotion of self-culture intersected with broader hopes of uplifting and guiding working-class people. For

most reformers, the point was not just to distinguish culture from amusements, it was also to create better individuals. According to Bennett (1995)⁹, the government aims associated with self-culture included uplifting taste, encouraging self-discipline, and, through these self-improvement strategies, preserving the future of civilization itself. Broadcasting economic news typifies the wish to improve the quality of thinking of the masses by exposing millions of people to one of the important tools to the poverty reduction efforts. Morgan argued that the media was desperately needed to curb the character flaws blamed for chronic unemployment¹⁰. As Ehrenreich (1990)¹¹ showed, the heightened attention to the problem of poverty in the 1960s often was humanitarian. It also was troubling, for it to cast the poor as “others” who were presumed to be suffering from what anthropologist Lewis (1966)¹² termed the “culture of poverty”. Among attributes ascribed to poverty were lack of ambition, inability to defer gratification, underdeveloped work ethic and indifference to self-improvement. Public television’s uplifting promises therefore intersected with broader thinking about the alleviation of educational inequality and poverty. Barnett (2004) pointed out that, “the approach developed in South Africa since 1994 rests upon a reconceptualisation of the spaces in which education and broadcasting are articulated together”¹³. Economic news gives a common basic economic knowledge to many individuals in developing countries and enables the latter to understand some solutions to poverty reduction. Feather (1994) argues

“The relationship between information and development appears to be close. If, for example, we look at the most successful Asian economies – Japan, Singapore and Korea – we find that they are indeed countries in which economic and scientific information are widely and easily available. In all three, information technology has been developed and exploited to a high level of sophistication. This has led not just to the more effective management of enterprises and institutions, although that has been an important factor, but also to major structural changes in economic activities”¹⁴.

In the next section, I appraise the quantity and the quality of economic news broadcast in the Cameroon Radio Television company (CRTV).

Economic News Broadcast in Cameroon

In the sixties and seventies, Cameroon was one of the most prosperous countries in Africa. However, the drop in commodity prices for its principal exports - oil, cocoa, coffee, and cotton - in the mid-1980s, combined with an overvalued currency and economic mismanagement, led to a decade-long recession. The per capita GDP fell by more than 60 per cent from 1986 to 1994. The current account and fiscal deficits deteriorated by half. Economic indicators continue to deteriorate and the steady decline in incomes led to 40 percent fall in per capita consumption

between 1985/86 and 1992/93. The external debt stock rose from less than one-third to more than three-quarters of GDP between 1984/85 and 1992/93. Investment declined from 27 percent to less than 11 percent of GDP. Four out of every ten Cameroonians in 2001 were living with an income below the poverty line of US \$1 per person per day¹⁵. With the support of the World Bank and IMF, the government embarked upon a series of economic reforms. Civil service wages were drastically cut by 65 percent in 1993¹⁶. The devaluation of the CFA franc by 50 per cent in 1994 and the privatisation of some State corporations were implemented. In December 2000, the IMF approved a 3-year Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF) program worth USD 133.7 million to reduce poverty and improve social services. The successful completion of the program would have allowed Cameroon to receive USD two billion in debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative¹⁷. In October 24th 2005, the Executive Board of the IMF, meeting in Washington, approved Cameroon's three-year economic programme under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) in an amount equivalent to SDR 18.57 million (10 percent of quota), and an additional interim assistance under the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative (SDR 5.70 million). The first advantage after the approval of the medium-term programme is that the CFA 200 billion that Cameroon had to pay as debt, would henceforth be treated within the framework of the completion point. The acceptance of the programme equally opens up the way for Cameroon to consider the engagements of the G-8 countries; that of cancelling debts of some poor countries of the world. In effect, in January 2006, IMF experts will be in Cameroon to review the execution of the first three months of the project. Thereafter, they would submit a report to the board of the IMF. The report will be examined by March-April 2006 and if the board of IMF judges it encouraging, it will then declare that Cameroon has attained the HIPC initiative; synonymous to cancellation of a significant part of the external debt of Cameroon.

Cameroon's triennial economic and financial paper that was approved by the IMF, integrates the main points of the Millennium Development Goal, which outlined Cameroon's priorities in alleviating poverty and undertaking strong macroeconomic commitments in the short and long-term. Today, thanks to such reforms, Cameroon's economy is gradually getting back on its feet. The solid performance in implementing the three-year economic and financial program 1997-2000 produced a noticeable improvement in macroeconomic stability and laid to the basis for sustained economic growth¹⁸. From 1996/1997 to 1999/2002, annual real GDP growth average 4.5 percent, while inflation, measured by the consumer price index was held to less than one percent. The current account deficit excluding official transfers declined from three percent of GDP in 1997/1998 to 1.5 percent in 1999/2000, as terms from trade improved. The real GDP growth in the non-oil economy is now expected to reach an average of 4.4 percent a year during

2005-08, the inflation rate is expected to be below 3 percent and an external current account deficit (excluding official transfers) below 5 percent of GDP by 2008.

However, the impact of such growth is still to be felt by the average person, as salaries are still low, goods and services are above the reach of the average person and living conditions generally poor. It is therefore not surprising that the IMF is asking the government of Cameroon to enhance its macroeconomic planning and financial accountability continue efforts to privatise the remaining para-statal enterprises, increase price competition in the banking sector, improve the judicial system, implement good governance practices and strengthen the fiscal position through mobilizing additional non-oil revenue in 2005-06. For example, the 2006 Cameroon budget seeks to raise non-oil revenue by 0.3 percentage points of non-oil GDP to generate domestic resources for priority spending, and strengthen the revenue base. The budget, therefore, proposes the raise of: excise tax, mineral waters, non-alcoholic carbonated beverages and fruit juices tax, enterprise tax, tariff, property tax, tax on timber. Such actions, it is believed, will reduce poverty in Cameroon.

The above observation encourages me to argue that economic news broadcast is likely to contribute to the understanding of some government options and encourage the population to endure certain sacrifices to enable the economy to get back on its feet. Communication has always been the central fact of human existence and social process. Dominick (1987) holds that communication is the carrier of the social process, which depends upon the accumulation, exchange and transmission of knowledge. He went on to point out "Without communication, man could achieve only the most primitive knowledge and social organisation – primitive or otherwise. Without communication, human society would remain static, grounded in instinctive behaviour, not much different from the societies of other animals"¹⁹. Due to the presence of Cameroon among countries embarked on the HIPC (Heavily Indebted Poor Countries) Debt Initiative and the argument that economic news broadcast contributes to the poverty reduction efforts, fieldwork on the Cameroon Radio Television company (CRTV) was conducted on 13/08/2004²⁰. The fieldwork emphasised the quality and quantity of economic news broadcast in the CRTV. The fieldwork survey information resulted to the following analysis.

In Cameroon, the public can only be informed through the mass media: radio, television and newspaper. In effect, this function of informing the public falls within the role of mass media in many developing countries. Following the liberalisation of the media landscape in 1990, there has been a proliferation of private newspapers, radio and television stations. Cable television is also making a strong entry into the media scene. These new media, however, cannot efficiently replace the public media of information in Cameroon. By extension, the ultimate consumer is not

offered the best product if the public media is sidelined in any issue. The reasons for this abound: print distribution is poor; the potential readers include a non-negligible number of unemployed dependent university graduates with very limited means; financial investments are too modest and a reading culture not very developed. In the same light, only few people can subscribe to cable television. Public radio and television therefore remain the most accessible means of mass communication today in Cameroon. Their low cost nature, the rapidity and instantaneity they offer and their ubiquitous character grease their accessibility. The national television remains the most democratic medium after the radio. According to the 1995 World Almanac and Book of Facts, there is one radio per 6.3 Cameroonians²¹. Television, introduced in Cameroon in 1985, has the greatest impact on the population due to its glamorous nature. Most Cameroonians are still fascinated by news broadcast on TV and look up to the daily newscasts and programmes for information, education and entertainment. The internal organisation in CRTV is geared at attaining this objective and has several departments. The department of information, for example, is made up of several services. These include political, economic, society, culture, science, sports/leisure and foreign. They are in charge of gathering news and producing news magazines. The economic service has the duty to collect, treat and broadcast economic news. Economic programmes are also the preserve of this service. In the next paragraph, I analyse my fieldwork information on quantitative and qualitative economic news broadcast over national television.

Quantitative Economic News Broadcast Over the CRTV

Timely and accurate economic information has always been important. But the space occupied by economic stories in newscasts is small when compared to the time accorded to news stories of other domains. Some newscasts fail to carry any economic story. Everett (1993) pointed out that, media content is “the most visible evidence of the working of media institutions”²². By implication, this means that, to journalists of this service, the situation can be blamed on the lack of fixed objectives. A CRTV journalist stated, “We are not obliged to occupy a certain amount of time in the newscast each day”²³. In the same light, a journalists interviewed argued that it is difficult to treat just any economic issue as most economic stories pass through the administration and commercial service because there is no clear distinction between advert and information. A CRTV journalist pointed out that “Journalists fear to venture into certain domains for fear of being accused of doing publicity”²⁴. The consequence of this state of affairs is that the journalists cease from being creative as they wait for press releases and government communiqués for information. “Our principal sources of information are government officials, economic operators, international news and the print media”²⁵, a reporter of the service noted. There is therefore very little brainstorming within the services to get interesting topics which can be treated in the news. Even where the journalist has the idea, financing is a problem. A journalist stressed that “I cannot remember when the house (CRTV) lastly paid a mission to cover an event. The organisers of the

event are responsible for the full cost of the event. Any interesting idea without a sponsor will certainly die²⁶. In view of the above evidence, it is not therefore surprising that there exists only one economic programme, (Croissance), broadcast over CRTV in French. It is a monthly, which presents a general review of economic events and gets the opinion of experts. There exists no equivalent in the English language. Again, this programme is not regular as re-broadcasting is a common phenomenon with it. In the same light, issues treated are far fetched and hardly interest the public. A journalist noted that, "The programme (Croissance) is company oriented. Most of those who come up on the programme pay to do so. Things that concern the common man are hardly broadcast because no one cares"²⁷. When we compare this situation to sports where there exist programmes on virtually a daily basis, then there is a real cause for concern. A journalist stressed that, "The sports service, for example, has two camera units and an editing desk to itself. They can organise and plan their work, as they want because they are directly attached to the general management. We can also produce programmes everyday if we are given similar means"²⁸.

Qualitative Economic News Broadcast Over the CRTV

Economic news broadcast over the CRTV is limited to factual reports. Very little commentaries and analysis are made. The reason for this is simple: most of the journalists of the service do not have in-depth training in economic reporting. None of the journalists of the economic service has specialised training in economic reporting. Most received general training in journalism at the Advanced School of Mass Communication (ASMAC). All the experience of journalists of the service has been on the job. Factual economic news reporting is the best way out for such reporters with a shallow knowledge of economics. The consequence of this state of affairs is that the public is not properly informed on economic issues. Such a television company is likely to cease being a typical media as "the media not only influences the social, economic and political order in which they perform, they are supposed to be influenced by it"²⁹.

The situation is even more confounded by the absence of opinion polls or audience survey studies which can indicate the lop holes in the system. The wonder then is to know how programmes are created, broadcast, maintained on the air or stopped. Studies still need to find out if it is through the arbitrariness or discretion of the management, production difficulties or end of editions or episodes. A study has blamed this on the shortage of editorial staff or unqualified or untrained staff, the absence of some programmes producers, lack of equipment and the over personalisation of some programmes³⁰. This discrepancy in programming notwithstanding, certain categories of programmes has been known to stand the taste of time. This is the case with sports, which have at least a programme a day. Many researchers have tackled the issue of the recommended 80 per cent local content goal in television programmes. Essomba (1993)

concluded that CRTV has encouraged “Mass entertainment and not mass education”³¹. To contribute to the effectiveness of the economic news broadcast by the CRTV, I propose the following policy implications.

- **Training of journalists in economics**

Such training will enable reporters of the economic service to be versed with economic issues and terms related to the poverty reduction efforts. This will enable them to better interpret and analyse economic trends and issues. Dominick (1987) argued that interpretation is not confined to editorials when he pointed out that “Articles devoted to an analysis of the causes behind a certain event or discussions of implications of a new government policy are also examples of the interpretation functions”³². Barton (1981) supports this when he says: “A journalist should be reasonably well educated, decently turned out and more than just comfortable in a given language. He or she needs a quick enquiring mind, one that is interested in knowing what is going on not only in his locality or even his country, but also in the world at large. An innate interest in mankind and mankind is up to. The phrase that sums this up is well rounded”³³. Boskin (2003) justifies why journalists should be well educated when he says: “The most important reason to improve the quality of economic statistics in the information age is to provide citizens with an accurate picture of where we are, where we are going, and how we compare with other nations”³⁴.

- **Institutionalise Economic News in Newscasts**

All newscasts on CRTV should carry economic stories on poverty reduction. This will instigate the reporters of the service to work harder and not to wait for government communiqués and seminars. If we follow the Lasswellan paradigm, “Who says what to whom, when, with what effects and how”³⁵, the media possesses a vertical dictatorship on its audience. This role should therefore be maximised.

- **Increase number of economic programmes on the poverty reduction efforts**

This is a managerial decision. CRTV management must express the desire to increase the quantity of economic productions. One programme is not enough. In addition, left on their own, there is very little that journalists of the economic desk can do on their own. As Kunczik (1988) puts it: “The individual full time journalist is a member of a hierarchical structured organisation to whose control he/she is subject and which influences the climate of intellectual production”³⁶. The production of economic programmes is likely to contribute to the national TV to attain its recommended 80 per cent local content goal. In addition, it will enable CRTV to keep abreast with certain burning issues in society. It will also help it to maintain its audience it gathered during its days of monopoly in Cameroon. Curran (1996) supported this view

“To attract a huge following, the media must stick to majority views, reflect prevailing values, and reinforce the primary assumptions of the social order. The more completely their content reasserts the form and character of existing society, the more efficiently the mass medium performs as an adjunct of the industrial order. To depart from the popularly sanctioned path is often to invite economic disaster”³⁷.

The mass media play an important role on curbing the idea and perception of people. This observation is supported again by Curran (1996) who argued that

“We must consider the power of the media not as a tidal wave but as a great river. It feeds the ground it touches, following the lines of existing contours but preparing the way for change over a long period. Sometimes it finds a spot where the ground is soft and ready, and there it cuts a new channel. Sometimes it carries material that helps to alter its banks. And occasionally, in time of flood, it washes away a piece of ground and gives the channel a new look”³⁸.

According to Sydney (1992) televisions and magazines, however serve public officials mainly as feedback devices, providing them with clues to how general, or informed public feels about their actions and statements³⁹.

- **Distinction between news and advert**

The internal battle between what is considered publicity and news, infringes on the public’s right to know. This is the case with the new CAMTEL mobile phone products whose news aspect has been totally ignored by the national television. Most Cameroonians do not yet have enough information on the products as CAMTEL has been portraying only its good aspect in its adverts. Economic journalists of CRTV were supposed to bring out the pros and cons of the new options. However, they have since remained silence for fear of being accused of carrying out publicity for CAMTEL. Feather (1994) is against such a practice. To him it infringes development. “If it is true that the possession of information is advantageous to the possessor, and its absence is a disadvantage, then it would seem to follow that information is essential to the development process⁴⁰”. There is no doubt that television stations need adverts to survive. However, it should not be at the expense of news.

- **Independence of journalists**

Journalists have to be rendered independent. The hands of the journalists of the economic service of CRTV are tied. They do not have the necessary working equipment. A journalist who relies on the organisers of an event to take him out on the field cannot be objective or creative. As the saying goes, he who pays the piper determines the tune. If organisers sponsor all missions, there can be no objective reporting. A journalist noted, "I am very frustrated when I have a good idea and can't see it materialise because of a given reason. As a journalist of the economic service, you cannot master your agenda as your activities are by others; the sponsors"⁴¹. Although the input of outside support cannot be under rated, journalists need their autonomy to play the role of gatekeepers.

- **Provision of working equipments**

Television is a medium with a high head count. Unlike the radio or the newspaper where one reporter can go out and cover an event, a team comprising a journalist, a camera operator and a competent technician is needed for a television report. The provision of more cameras, vehicles for coverage and editing desks will certainly help to improve upon the working condition of journalists.

- **Organisation of Opinion Polls by CRTV**

Opinion polls will enable the corporation to know what type of information the public wants. It will certainly help it reorganise its programme schedule and determine where to lay priorities and how to include economic news in their programmes.

Conclusion

Based on the microeconomic analysis of the television industry, I have been able to argue that economic news broadcast contributes to the poverty reduction efforts. My fieldwork in the CRTV indicated poor quality and quantity economic news broadcast in Cameroon. To improve the effectiveness of the economic news broadcast in the CRTV, I proposed that journalists undertake economic training, Economic news in newscasts should be institutionalised, a clear distinction between news and advert is needed, the number of economic programmes needs to increase, I advocate independence of journalists, the provision of working equipment and finally the organisation of Opinion Polls⁴².

Notes

¹ Peter Hjertholm (2003) p.67

² Nancy Birdsall, Stijn Claessens and Ishac Diwan (2003) p.410

³ AFRODAD (April 2002) P. 8

⁴ World Electronic Media Forum (2003)

⁵ Erich Vogt (2004) p.2

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- ⁶ John Feather (1994) p.85
- ⁷ Marshall McLuhan (1964) P.191.
- ⁸ William P. Eveland Jr, Krisztina Marton, Mihye Seo (2004) p.82
- ⁹ Tony Bennet (1995) p.17
- ¹⁰ Morgan quoted in Rubin (1992) *Middlebrow Culture*, p.272
- ¹¹ Barbara Ehrenreich (1990) p.48
- ¹² Oscar Lewis (1996) p.20
- ¹³ Clive Barnett (2004) p.257
- ¹⁴ John Feather (1994) P.87
- ¹⁵ IMF(2003) p.30
- ¹⁶ IMF (2003) p.30
- ¹⁷ IMF (2003) p.30
- ¹⁸ IMF (2003) p.32
- ¹⁹ Dominick (1987) p.10
- ²⁰ On the 13/08/2004, interviews of a sample of five national television journalists in the economic service of the CRTV were conducted. The survey was conducted in the CRTV building at Mballa II – Yaoundé, Cameroon. My samples were chosen on the spot. However, two journalists were prepared to be interviewed only on appointment.
- ²¹ The World Almanac and Book of Facts (1995) p.752
- ²² Denis Everett (1983) p. 87.
- ²³ Interview with CRTV Journalist A (13/08/2004)
- ²⁴ Interview with CRTV Journalist B (13/08/2004)
- ²⁵ Interview with CRTV Journalist C (13/08/2004)
- ²⁶ Interview with CRTV Journalist D (13/08/2004)
- ²⁷ Interview with CRTV Journalist E (13/08/2004)
- ²⁸ Interview with CRTV Journalist B (13/08/2004)
- ²⁹ Dominick (1987) p.17
- ³⁰ Chia Innocent(1995) p. 36
- ³¹ Essomba (1993) p.18
- ³² Dominick (1987) p.14
- ³³ Frank (1981) p. 16
- ³⁴ Michael Boskin (2003) p.20
- ³⁵ Notes in journalism at the ASMAC quoted by Chia Innocent (1995) in *Media Content: The case of CRTV Radio Programme "Hotline"*, Undergraduate research work at ASMAC p. 36)
- ³⁶ Michael Kunczik (1988) p.12
- ³⁷ Curran (1996) p.34
- ³⁸ *Ibid* p. 35
- ³⁹ Sydney W. Head and Christopher Sterling (1992) p.76
- ⁴⁰ John Feather (1994) P.86
- ⁴¹ Interview with CRTV Journalist E (13/08/2004)

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