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Working Paper Series

FemmePowermentAfrique: Introducing the scope and design of the project

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February 2019

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FemmepowermentAfrique

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FemmePowermentAfrique: Introducing the scope and design of the project

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FemmePowermentAfrique: Introducing the scope and design of the project

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Executive Summary

This working paper defines the scope of the FemmePowermentAfrique project, its significance, its research approach and its intended beneficiaries. This project originated in an impact assessment of radio on women’s rights and empowerment in Niger, yet has broadened to incorporate a series of related and important research questions. The research draws on various methodologies including focus groups with listeners, semi-structured interviews, workshops and context analysis of radio output. The project pursues the following aims:

1. To assess the impact of radio on women’s rights and empowerment in the Sahel region of Africa. Three countries have been selected for initial investigation: Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso.

2. To assess perceptions of female empowerment within the context of these countries, particularly in comparison with existing concepts and those widely used by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and countries and donors in the North.
3. To produce recommendations on the use of radio with regard to women's rights and empowerment to be used by media development organisations, civil society organisations, journalists and the media, donors, and research organisations.
4. To contribute to understandings of impact and its measurement.
5. To contribute to methodological approaches used by researchers working in the field.
6. To benefit radio organisations, media, listeners and marginalised and disempowered communities in the three countries through the application of the recommendations.
7. To identify other geographic and topic areas that could benefit from the research findings and methodology (for example, youth, governance, and radicalisation).

Introduction

Widespread gender inequality affects Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali. In Niger, for example, there is a 75% child marriage rate and over 33% of teenage girls are married before they are 15 (UNFPA 2012). School completion rates are low (15.1% for girls and 34.5% for boys) resulting in high illiteracy rates (Save the Children 2016). Polygamy is also extensive. Violence against women is rife and female genital mutilation (FGM) is common despite being illegal (Thomson Reuters 2018). This is a patriarchal and religious society and women do not have the same legal status as men in the traditional and customary courts. The situation is similar in Mali and Burkina Faso. In the former, recent rulings have declared that Mali's Persons and Family Code violates human rights standards as it does not establish, amongst others, a minimum marital age, the right to consent to marry or the right to inheritance (AfCHPR 2018). It serves, instead to reinforce ongoing polygamy, widespread male dominance, domestic violence, FGM, and resistance to women's work outside the home. Gender inequality in primary education is reducing as campaigns are encouraging enrolment amongst girls but this has not extended to secondary education. In Burkina Faso, 50% of girls are married under the age of 18 and one in ten is married before they are fifteen (UNICEF, 2014). Here, tradition, cultural norms, lack of education and poverty contribute to high levels of child marriage. Despite being important stakeholders in many aspects of daily life, women in these countries are, in many cases, disempowered, and require more information about their rights, and a greater voice in society.

The most important source of information these women have is radio, which is particularly suited to reaching marginalised and isolated communities in conflict- and post-conflict-affected settings. Despite the advantages of radio and its wide use in these countries, radio broadcasts can often be partisan, not news-based, not relevant to particular communities, and also in French (not local languages). A major task here is not only to increase and develop the targeting of programmes to include more women-related themes but also to improve the

content of the broadcasts themselves, so as to raise awareness amongst this group regarding their rights and help them empower themselves politically and economically.

Sustainable improvements in radio programmes targeted at, and produced by, women will contribute to improving the information provided to this group, raising their voice in their communities and increasing both their community participation and awareness of their activities. This, in turn, will contribute to a long-term, direct positive impact on women's lives in the Sahel countries. Major efforts to achieve this have already been made by media development agencies in the region and significant attempts have been made to ensure that gender transformative approaches are incorporated into both media content and practice. Yet measuring the impact of this work and these approaches is challenging.

The research project will therefore apply a rigorous impact measurement methodology to assess the impact of radio on women's rights and empowerment in the Sahel region of Africa to investigate perceptions of women's empowerment in this context and to produce recommendations to the benefit of radio organisations, media, listeners and marginalised and disempowered communities in the three countries.

Research context

There is little doubt about the importance of radio in the Sahel region of Africa. This region, many of whose countries are at the bottom of the Human Development Index (UNDP 2018), suffers from extreme poverty, unemployment, low levels of education and therefore high illiteracy rates, high rates of population growth, food insecurity and low levels of development (Gilpin 2013, Zyck and Muggah 2013). These are, in the main, patriarchal societies where women suffer widespread gender inequality and do not have access to the same legal status as men in the traditional and customary courts. In most West African countries, there are national gender policies or strategies but these could be perceived as an afterthought and despite the gender gap closing, albeit very slowly, women remain severely disempowered.

In such a fragile environment where political instability prevails, and where there is a background of political crises, coups d'état, protest movements and illegal trafficking, factual and independent information is critical. Yet accurate and independent information is not always available or accessible. Television and internet use is limited in the region because electricity is only accessible to 15% of the population. The internet also does not cover much of the countries in question and when it does, it is weak or unstable, again limiting access to information. Even if there were access to computers and the internet, the low literacy rates would prevent their full use.

Radio is the main source of information as it is cheap and portable (Hendy 2000), requires no mains source of energy, targets illiterate or oral-based communities and can be broadcast in local languages. Another characteristic of radio in this region is that it is increasingly, and

extensively, being accessed by mobile phone. Few participants in the study thus far have said they do not have a mobile phone and most have stated they access the radio via their phones. This has the added advantage that interaction between listeners and radios is increased (Gilberds and Myers 2012; Nassanga et al. 2013; Sullivan 2011) as people are encouraged to phone in and comment. Radio is also a secondary medium enabling populations to listen whilst continuing with their tasks, driving to work, working in the fields or, for women, completing their domestic chores. At a time when donor attention has been focusing on migration and radicalisation, with the risk of side-lining all matters gender-related, radio can play a significant role in making women's voices heard in political discussions and peace processes. Also, as a development and democratising tool, it allows listeners to become better informed and be given opportunities to get their voices heard through phone-ins, talk shows and discussions (Chignell 2009; Hartley 2000). Radio therefore has the ability to influence many sectors of society and promote empowerment.

Yet understanding the concept of empowerment is complex and a single definition is difficult to apply to all contexts. The concept is used at all levels including the UN Sustainable Development Goals which provide a "specific gendered meaning: the transformation of the relations of power between men and women, within and across social categories of various kinds" (Batliwala 2007: 560). Empowerment can be defined as "people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (Kabeer 1999: 437). Giving such choices to women to enable them make decisions may emerge on various levels each with significant impact. These can be categorised as first- or second-order choices (Kabeer 1999; Jansson 2014). The former may be whether to engage in politics (Arestoff and Djemai 2016) whilst the latter may reflect "everyday decisions which do not affect the overall outcome of a woman's life" (Kabeer 1999: 437). The opposite of empowerment – disempowerment, or being constrained from making choices, a situation possibly resulting from existing cultural norms and values – must also be examined.

The consideration that women's empowerment differs according to context is further complicated by the fact that there is also no single definition of 'woman'. Regarding disempowerment, women's complicity with patriarchal dominance, as well as the fact that this may result from coercion and conflict, must also be taken into account (Kabeer 1999; Porter 2013). It would also be simplistic to consider all women in all societies to be homogenous without any reflection of their education, age, ethnicity or class (Hughes and Drubow 2018). Nor can all women be considered to be subjugated. Indeed, the project has witnessed many instances of notable agency amongst women with evidence of representation in local associations, in NGOs and at mayoral level, to say nothing of micro-credit groups which exist throughout the region and help women conduct limited, income-generating activities. Thus, consideration is needed of how 'women's empowerment' may change according to the context and therefore how attempts to promote it within these differing frameworks may prove more, or less, effective in some than others. The project seeks to address this by determining a context-specific definition of women's empowerment for this region and suggesting ways in which radio can improve its contribution to promoting this empowerment without risk of it being rejected because of

clashes with the dominant traditional and societal structures. Small changes within the existing framework may prove life-enhancing.

Research structure

Radio, in whatever its form, be it state, commercial, or community can have a significant impact on society (Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada, 2002; Howley, 2005; Lewis, 2002) and can shape the lives of marginalised and disempowered communities (Agosta, 2001), with women falling into these categories. Yet measuring radio's impact, specifically regarding women's rights and empowerment, is complex; it cannot easily be isolated nor can it be assumed that any measureable or observable impact has been triggered by radio alone without taking into account interference from other information sources.

The aim of this project is therefore to assess the impact of radio on women's rights and empowerment in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. It contributes to radio and communication studies, African studies, gender studies and development studies. Its methodology also contributes to the domain of Monitoring and Evaluation.

Research Questions

The project addresses the following Research Questions:

1. How are women and women's rights and empowerment represented by radio?
2. What are the influences shaping this representation (socio-cultural, traditional, religious, political, economic, etc.)?
3. To what extent can (and does) radio shape listeners' understanding of and reaction to women's rights and empowerment? And how does it do this?
4. How do journalists, media organisations, civil society organisations (CSOs, NGOs) and listeners perceive 'empowerment'? How can it be defined within the context of the three countries?
5. Can the radio provision generally, and regarding women's empowerment particularly, be improved and how?
6. Can best practices, if identified, both generally and regarding women's empowerment, be exchanged between one type of information provider to another (bottom-up to top-down, for example)?
7. Can understandings of women's empowerment amongst journalists, media organisations, listeners, and civil organisations (CSOs, NGOs) be improved?

The project comprises three phases and draws on a holistic approach which incorporates focus groups, semi-structured interviews, knowledge exchange workshops, and rigorous content analysis.

Radios and source material

The project uses radio broadcasts from two media development organisations: Fondation Hironnelle¹ and International Media Support (IMS).² Fondation Hironnelle is a Swiss-based non-profit organisation which seeks to provide independent national information in conflict- and crisis-affected regions. Whilst their approach could be considered ‘top-down’, they also depend on local correspondents who feed their national programming. Amongst the countries in which it operates are Niger and Mali through Studio Kalangou and Studio Tamani respectively. These radio studios broadcast for two hours a day, providing news and discussion programmes in French and local languages. Broadcasts from the capitals are transmitted via satellite to partner radios located throughout the country who re-broadcast them locally using their FM networks. Both studios broadcast themed programmes some of which focus on women. For example, in 2018, Studio Kalangou broadcast one series on women in politics, and another on child marriage. The project draws on such series.

IMS adopts a contrasting approach. Its regional Sahel Programme, 2018-2021,³ covers the conflict-ridden border area between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Rather than producing one programme from each capital and relayed to each country, the Sahel Programme is working with women’s listening groups associated with local, community radios. These groups determine and produce topics of particular interest to their community for broadcasts over the following three months. The approach is therefore bottom-up. The project analyses these broadcasts and they provide the basis for comparison with Fondation Hironnelle’s output.

The project began in April 2018 with a scoping visit to Niger with focus groups and interviews with radio stations, media organisations, NGOs/CSOs, and training institutes and continues until the end of 2020 (see project stages in Figure 2). The project consists of three phases:

1. The first phase comprises a baseline assessment involving focus groups, and Knowledge Exchange Workshop I (Niger – June 2018; Mali – April 2019).
2. The second phase is the content analysis of the radio broadcasts (Niger – July-December 2018; Mali – May-November 2020; Burkina Faso – November 2019 – March 2019).
3. The third phase involves repeat focus groups and Knowledge Exchange Workshop II (Niger – January 2019; Mali – December/January 2019/20). As the project evolves, the findings from Niger will be transferred, reinforced or challenged in the new context of Mali.

The IMS output contributes data for the Burkina Faso section of the analysis.

¹ Fondation Hironnelle: <https://www.hironnelle.org/en/>

² IMS: <https://www.mediasupport.org/areas/africa/sahel/>

³ IMS Sahel programme: https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Sahel_one-pager_nov-2018-1.pdf

Stage 1

The first stage comprises a baseline evaluation, widely asserted to be best practice when conducting assessments, which can then be used as a comparison with post-intervention data (Mefalopulos 2005: 255; Mosher 2011: 247; Taylor 2010: 2). The baseline consists of 20 focus groups, each with five participants (McCracken 1998; Saint-German et al 1993; Lunt and Livingstone 1996), conducted in and around Niamey and Bamako, the respective capital cities of Niger and Mali. The participants are selected for each focus group from various pre-determined categories: rural or urban, married women, unmarried women, and men, thus ensuring representativeness. The focus groups each last approximately an hour and are conducted in French by the same facilitator. This stage also includes semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives (managers, editors) from radio stations, and general media organisations. A knowledge exchange workshop is also organised in each capital inviting journalists, and representatives from media organisations, civil society organisations and media training institutes.

All parties in all activities (focus groups, interviews and workshops) are asked similar questions regarding their understanding of women's empowerment, their use of the radio, their own role and status in society and also that of women, principle influences that shape women's lives in the two countries, and how radio could be improved to better shape understandings of women's rights and empowerment. Information is therefore gathered from a range of radio users whose positions in society differ: listeners, producers, advisors, and trainers.

For the IMS broadcasts, because their production, editors and listeners are in conflict areas, face-to-face focus groups cannot be conducted by the research team. Instead, telephone interviews are conducted based on the same questions as above to support the quantitative analysis of the radio output.

The focus groups are audio-recorded and the data is both transcribed and analysed in French during Stage 2 using the software Nvivo. Both quantitative and qualitative data are produced.

Stage 2

In contrast to many assessments which, according to Noske-Turner (2015) are more qualitative than quantitative, the second stage of the project provides rigorous quantitative data in equal measure to the qualitative data. This stage comprises a content analysis of the focus groups, interviews and radio programmes. Two series of women-related programmes broadcast weekly and lasting approximately forty-five minutes (by Studio Kalangou in Niger and Studio Tamani in Mali, both Fondation Hironnelle-run radio studios) are transcribed from the original French audio tape then examined.

Broadcasts are coded using Nvivo according to negative or positive terms for women, stereotypes, perceptions of women, gender of guests and airtime given to them, geographical references and so on. In addition, broadcasts from a whole week, chosen at random and broadcast by the same studios, are analysed in the same manner and the findings from the women-related programmes are compared with these to determine whether gender mainstreaming emerges in both or just the former, and to what extent. The transcribed data from the focus groups in Stages 1 and 3 are coded similarly to conduct a comparative analysis.

For the IMS-associated section of the project, broadcasts are in local languages (Fulfuldé, Tamashek and Zarma). They are transcribed into the local language and then translated into French. At each stage, independent accuracy checks are conducted to ensure that the transcriptions correspond to the original broadcasts, and that the translations correspond to the transcriptions. This process (transcriptions, translations and corresponding checks) could be perceived as straightforward yet has inherent complexities which are also being investigated and interrogated by the project as a side issue.

The translations are then coded and analysed using the same coding categories.

Stage 3

On completion of the content analysis in Stage 2, focus groups are then repeated with the same participants as in Stage 1. Information from the content analysis in Stage 2 is used as the basis for the questions in Stage 3. Participants are asked to compare their opinions and behaviour with Stage 1. They are questioned about the broadcasts, their opinions on them generally and their styles and contents. They are probed to determine whether certain information or styles have been absorbed. The responses are transcribed and the information is compared with Stage 1.

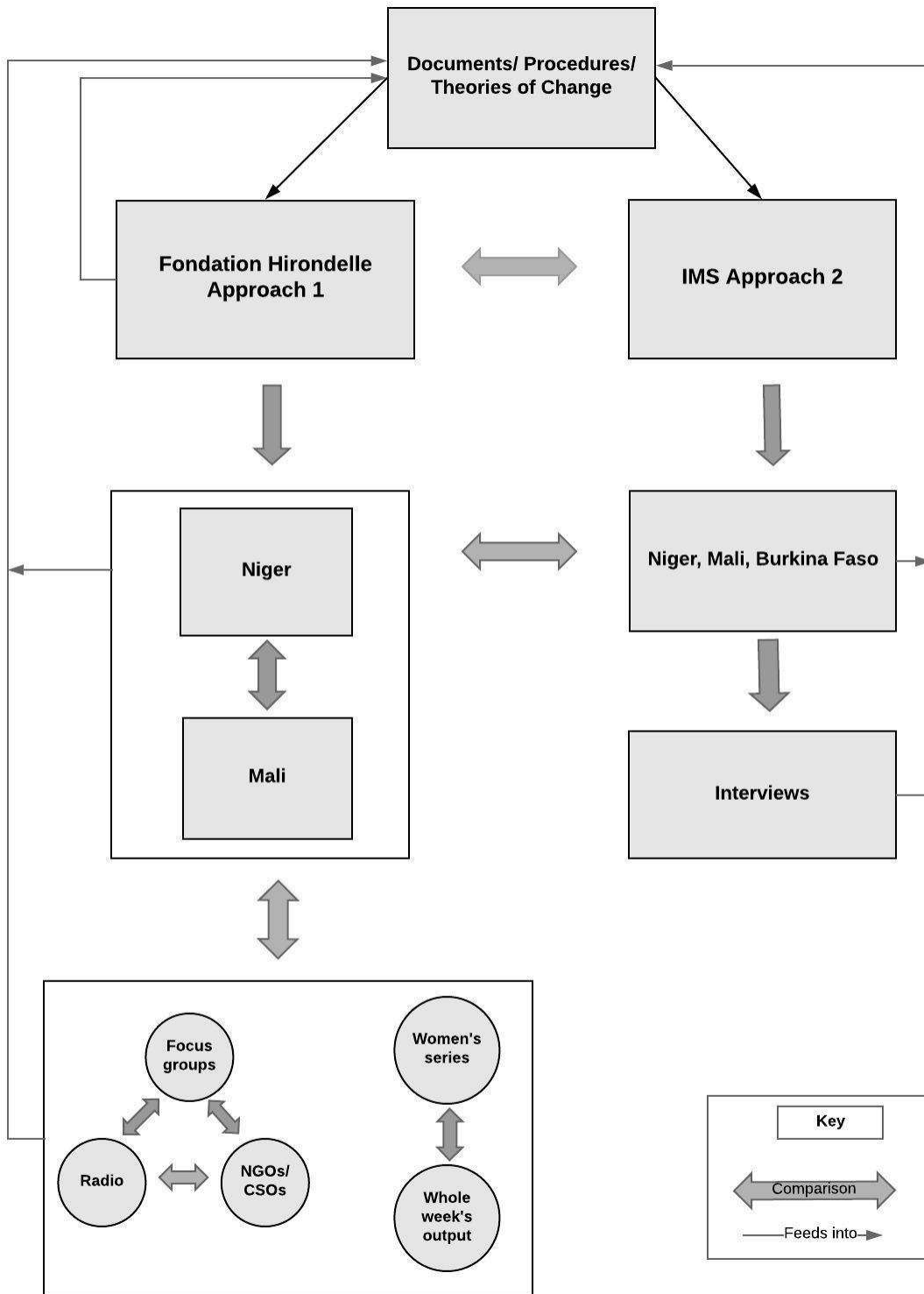
A further knowledge exchange workshop is organised in each capital. Research findings are presented and feedback is requested.

Thus, in order to address the overall aims and objectives of the project, various aspects will be compared as follows (See Figure 1 below):

1. the Fondation Hirondelle approach (capital city generated content) with the IMS approach (local generated content)
2. the Fondation Hirondelle output (Niger, Mali) with the IMS output (Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso)
3. the Fondation Hirondelle output in Mali with the Fondation Hirondelle output in Niger
4. focus group responses with radio representative responses with NGO/CSOs responses
5. data from the Fondation Hirondelle women-themed programmes with the sample week of Fondation Hirondelle programmes

6. the findings from points 4 and 6 will then be compared with each other
7. IMS output with the responses from the interviews with IMS radio stations.

Figure 1: Comparative Analysis Structure



In sum, rather than conducting the “principally used [approach of] desk-based research with stakeholder interviews and [...] some minor quantitative study” (Noske-Turner 2105), the project provides a holistic assessment of radio and its impact on women’s rights and empowerment interrogating representatives of all those involved. This will therefore determine:

- what journalists and media organisations think they are offering to listeners,
- what listeners would like to receive from the broadcasts,
- what civil society organisations think listeners should be receiving,
- and, from the content analysis, what the listeners are actually receiving.

Representatives from regulatory bodies and training institutes are also questioned and their input is considered.

Figure 2: Project stages	
Scoping Visit	Focus groups Interviews with radio stations, media organisations, NGOs/CSOs, and training institutes
Stage 1	Knowledge Exchange Workshop I Baseline evaluation comprising focus groups, interviews
Stage 2	Transcription (French to French) of the Fondation Hirondelle radio broadcasts Content analysis of the Fondation Hirondelle radio broadcasts. Transcription and translation (and checks) of the IMS radio broadcasts Content analysis of the IMS radio broadcasts Comparative analyses
Stage 3	Knowledge Exchange Workshop II Repeat focus groups

Figure 2 outlines the main stages in the project. Data dissemination occurs throughout the project, for example, at activities such as academic conferences and workshops. It has a website⁴ (under the project’s name – FemmepowermentAfrique – which encompasses the various concepts of the project: women, empowerment and Francophone Africa) and a twitter feed.⁵

Funding

The project is funded by the University of Sheffield, UKRI and ESRC. Funding for the Mali section of the project is from SIDA, Denmark, the EU and Swiss cooperation via Fondation Hirondelle, all of whom have gender equality as a prioritised issue.

⁴ www.femmepowermentAfrique

⁵ [@femmepowerafriq](https://twitter.com/femmepowerafriq)

Who will benefit from the research and how?

Although the project aims to conduct an impact assessment of radio output, it will have an impact itself and a broad range of beneficiaries.

Figure 3: Project beneficiaries	
Media development organisations (Fondation Hirondelle and IMS)	Project recommendations will contribute to establishing best practice and incorporating this best practice into strategies and training programmes.
	Findings can be applied in similar projects in other countries
	Findings will be able to demonstrate impact and support funding applications
Donors	Development indicators will provide an overview of impact and help assess future similar projects.
Marginalised communities and community bodies (women, those living in isolated regions)	Amendments and improvements to the women-related programmes resulting from this project will contribute to greater awareness of rights and empowerment amongst women in the three countries.
	Case studies of best practice will be identified and shared with local and capital content providers towards the continuous development of the programmes.
	Feedback from CSOs and women will be fed back to Fondation Hirondelle and IMS to inform their efforts to improve the provision. This will be to the benefit of women and will allow them to be involved in a dialogue about an initiative designed for them.
Civil society groups	Knowledge exchange will help better raise civil society groups' voices and enable them to learn how they could participate on radio shows, how to present their campaigns and ideas, resulting in better information being provided to women.
Radio and their staff, and partner radios	The project's recommendations will help the radio stations through adjustments to on-going training programmes, shaping of the general and women-related radio output and transferring the approach to other topic areas.
Other conflict-affected areas	Communities in other conflict-affected areas will benefit from this project by using the findings and transferring the knowledge to other similar projects, run by Fondation Hirondelle or IMS or other media development organisations.
Academic knowledge	The project will also contribute to the generation of academic knowledge, to radio and communication studies, African studies, gender studies, and development studies. It will contribute to the latter through analysing the methodology in question and providing recommendations to other researchers doing fieldwork.

Significance – ongoing importance of this project – external influences

Radio is important in Africa and this significance has been discussed extensively in many domains including health, education, development, governance, communication to name but a few. It is also evolving both technologically and generationally (Moyo 2013). The ever-increasing use of mobile phones – the first modern telecommunications infrastructure in sub-Saharan Africa – has brought with it notable economic benefits, particularly regarding agriculture and labour, and governance (Aker and Mbiti 2010; Asongu and Nwachukwu 2016; Gagliardone 2016; Nassanga et al. 2013). Mobile phones are associated with the increasing and influential use of Facebook and WhatsApp (Pindayi 2017) and the option for listeners, especially youth, to shift towards such platforms away from more traditional outlets. Indeed, many young people in the study thus far have not only dismissed radio as being for older generations, but have suggested that they prefer social media platforms to radio.

By highlighting particular strategies used by specific stations and determining the extent to which they are absorbed by listeners, the project will demonstrate how radio, especially given its usefulness for women, remains an important tool in promoting awareness of women's rights and empowerment amongst women and a broader audience. There are many influences which negatively affect the promotion of women's empowerment in this region (religion and its misinterpretations, customs and traditions, education, patriarchy, amongst others). This raises important questions about how radio, as the region's main source of information, can target specific audiences to counter the prevailing gender inequality, assist the many positive examples of female empowerment and enable women to work together to strengthen their solidarity and agency. "We need to empower women. And to empower women, we need women everywhere. They have to be where decisions are made. There is no power for women without women in power," (Foumakoye, 2018) but empowerment must be promoted at all levels in society. Thus, if radio can target the right audiences, at the right times, with the right content, and continue to improve its output and increase its impact, once measured, the lives of the very women in the disempowered and marginalised groups it is aiming to improve will only benefit.

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